

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	9 July 2012
<b>Subject:</b> Burnham Beeches Consultation Group Minutes – 3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2012	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common	<b>For Information</b>
<p><b><u>Summary</u></b></p> <p>This report provides your committee with the minutes of the April meeting of the Burnham Beeches Consultation Group (BBCG).</p> <p>The topics covered included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The expansion of the conservation grazing scheme across Burnham Beeches.</li> <li>• 2011/12 budget outturn.</li> <li>• Update on the introduction of Secondary Authority Powers under the Clean Neighbourhood Act, 2005.</li> <li>• Mitigation of the impacts of housing development on the Beeches.</li> </ul> <p>The BBCG remains broadly supportive of the above issues.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To receive this report</li> </ul>	

### **Minutes of Burnham Beeches Consultation Group - 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2012**

1. **Welcome** – By the Chairman Mrs B Newman. New members – Mary Kolhose (The Avenue Residents Association) and Nick Naylor (Burnham Parish Council)
2. **Apologies** - Gordon Haines (Alderman, City of London). Sue Ireland (Director, City of London), Don Lindskog (Disability Access), Mr and Mrs Eley (Local Business), Alan French (Rotarian), Peter Adams (Burnham Society), Martin Albertini (Bucks Invertebrates Group), Bill Lidgate (SBDC), Mark Frater (Farnhams Society), Peter Cathcart (Farnham Parish Council)

3. **Minutes of the last meeting** – reviewed and agreed. Peter Henry informed the meeting that Green Lane; Burnham would be closed for re-surfacing w/c 8<sup>th</sup> May.

4. **Financial Outcome 2011 – 2012**

AB reported the financial outturn of the last financial year, including the impact of the budget cuts and income generation in mitigation.

5. **Café Update**

Kavan Harley reported that the Beeches Café had been involved with a large number of community events. It is a very weather dependent business with good turnover during the warm January to March and a downturn in April due to the wet, cold weather. The car park charges do not appear to have had an impact on trade at the café, with people often purchasing items and returning once they have obtained change for the ticket machines. The menus and cafe signage have been refreshed. The availability of high speed Wi-Fi has been welcomed by customers and covering its costs.

6. **Expansion of the Conservation Grazing scheme – Superintendent (AB)**

The project to expand conservation grazing across Burnham Beeches is the keystone project of the current Management Plan. AB explained the issues presented by the public roads that run through the Beeches and the need for some form of barrier to prevent cattle using them to leave the site. The ‘Invisible Fencing’ option was outlined and its potential use at the Beeches explained. A short film was shown that demonstrated ‘Invisible Fencing’ in action.

AB explained that a 15ha trial would be undertaken this year in the Park Lane area and that if successful, further grazing areas would be created in 2013. The use of Invisible Fencing would then be reviewed and if still considered appropriate, its use will be expanded to allow approximately 95% of the Beeches to be grazed. The system would also be used to restrict livestock access to areas such as the café and car parks. If, after the review, it is found that invisible fencing is not appropriate we will reconsider the use of real cattle grids or perhaps a compromise between the two options.

Invisible fencing can also be used to create ‘virtual cattle grids’ on the public highway but this requires consent from Buckinghamshire County Council. BCC will also need to carry out appropriate ‘safety audits’ and resolve any liability issues. The roads affected by the scheme are designated as ‘C’ or ‘Unclassified’ and it is hoped that the proximity of grazing animals will help to justify further reductions to the speed limit (currently 40mph or 60 mph).

We intend to gradually increase the number of livestock at BB as more grazing land becomes available to them. We currently graze 10 animals on 25% of the site. We anticipate that there will be no more than 20-25 animals (cows or ponies) to be found on the site at any one time once the project is completed.

Q: How long do the batteries in the collar and ground box last?

A: Up to a year. We will check them regularly. Newer models will hopefully have a 'low battery' warning light. The cattle also learn not to enter certain areas after two shocks.

Q: C. Spicer queried incorporating the highways as this seemed to be a complicating factor.

A: It was explained that the site is a SSSI and SAC and that designation includes the small parcels of land that sit on the 'other side of the road' to the main body of land. It is important that all of BB is protected equally hence inclusion of the highways in the plan.

Q: R Bright was concerned about the size of the collars for the animals.

A: Head Ranger Martin Hartup (MH) assured the meeting that trials are now occurring with smaller collars, even on goats in Germany. The BB ponies are the first horses to trial the collars - they only received one zap before they learned not to cross the hidden cable!

Q: P Henry requested AB to attend The Avenue residents committee meeting to explain the scheme further when necessary. PH to advise of the date. **PH**

A: AB agreed to do so.

It was suggested that the community would become far more involved as 'eyes and ears' for problems with the livestock than they have done in the past. We will pursue this option as the project progresses.

## **7. Visitor Numbers – Survey Results**

Conservation Officer Helen Read reported on the outcome of the year-long visitor survey and volunteers and staff were thanked for their contribution to the project. The data collected will now aid management decisions and be particularly useful when compiling grant applications.

The last survey was carried out in 2002 – 2003 when Lord Mayors Drive was still open to through traffic. The results of the latest survey show a marginal (2.4%) increase in visitors which now stand at around 585,000 per annum. The survey also recorded a very large increase in dog visits (40%) when compared to the last survey although some of this will be due to improved recording procedures.

The closure of two car parks since the survey means that we already need to refine the data and we will be doing this over the next few months.

The Higher Level Stewardship grant has recently funded the installation of 'people counters' in the gates at Stoke Common and we will present the first year's data to members as soon as it is available.

## **8. Dog Control Orders**

Secondary Authority status is required to introduce Dog Control Orders at BB and SC as the sites are owned by the City of London but located in another Local Authority's area. Secondary Authority status will be confirmed by parliament on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012. We then intend to introduce DCO's to tackle some of the poor behaviour issues witnessed on the sites each day. It is anticipated that the introduction of DCO's will take 18 - 24 months. It is a very complex issue and care will be taken to consult and inform visitors as we proceed. The DCO's will replace the existing byelaw required to 'keep dogs under effective control' and will make it an offence for the following issues:

- Failure to remove dog faeces
- Failure to put a dog on a lead
- Allowing a dog to enter into an exclusion zone
- Walking a larger than agreed amount of dogs on site at one time by one person.

Q: Are the livestock on site affect by dog faeces?

A: Yes they could be if we wanted to breed from them, the nutrient damage to the site is considerable.

Q: Will any further dog bins be placed on site?

A: BB currently provides 16 bins on the site at a cost of nearly £3,000 per annum. The site is an NNR and SSSI not an urban green space and excessive bins could be detrimental to the site.

## **9. Planning Issues**

Although the Beeches is protected through the City's Open Spaces Act of 1878, the land on the immediate boundary of the site is not. This unprotected land presents property developers with an ideal opportunity to maximise their profit margins and is under intense pressure in terms of the scale of housing development being carried out. Planning laws have not been particularly effective at protecting the Beeches from the impact of this type of development and the effect it is having on the habitats and wildlife is becoming increasingly apparent. BB have commissioned specialist consultants to establish how best to protect the Beeches in planning law. Their report has been extremely useful and the protection of the Beeches is now an on-going debate between the City, SBDC and Natural England.

Q: Nick Naylor attending the meeting on behalf of Cllr Lin Hazell invited AB to the next Environment Committee chaired by Bill Lidgate to make a presentation to Committee members to help this case.

A: AB thanked Nick for this invite and confirmed he would like to attend.

Q: A Booth queried whether Stoke Common would have similar planning problems?

A: AB confirmed that he is also aware of the areas around the common and is monitoring them closely.

Q: Peter Henry mentioned that certain areas around the Beeches used to be areas designated as areas of outstanding beauty and would this still stand or be re-introduced.

A: AB thanked Peter for this and would like to see any information or paperwork he has on this matter if all possible. **PH**

## **10. Key Achievements**

MH updated the meeting on the activities and achievements on both sites over the last 6 months:

- 35 Ancient Pollards have been worked on to aid longevity.
- Years 3&4 Stoke Common restoration work has been completed at Stoke Common.
- Volunteers have once again made major contributions to the work programmes at both sites.
- Many events have been delivered including the Easter Trail, Build a Bird Feeder, Simply Walks, Monthly guided walks, licenced events and the Sports Relief mile.
- Monthly updates/newsletter//school visits/educational information.
- Update of website design.
- Electric bikes have been purchased for the site to help reduce vehicle running costs.

## **11. AOB**

The Chairman enquired if there were any further matters arising or questions regarding the meeting. None were forthcoming.

AB thanked Mrs Newman for all her support as Chairman over the past three years and informed members that she will soon retire as Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

- 12. Date of next meeting-** **Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> July.**
- Meeting place** The Burnham Beeches Café
- Time** 18.45 for 19.00 start. Ends 21.00
- Purpose** Site tour of north-west boundary and proposed invisible fencing trial area

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