

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons	7 th March 2016
Subject: Superintendent's Update	Public
Report of: Superintendent of 'The Commons'	For Information
Summary	
<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>	
Recommendation	
<p>Members are asked to note the contents of this report.</p>	

PLANNING CONTROL

Burnham Beeches

Local Development Plans.

1. The Conservation Officer and Superintendent have submitted comments to South Bucks District and Chilterns Council's re their Local Development Plan proposals. Concerns have been raised concerning proposals to allocate land for housing in the local greenbelt in close proximity to the Beeches area with the potential for around 2000 dwellings and the impact this may have on the SAC.
2. The Superintendent has been approached to similarly comment on Tandridge Council's Local Development plan proposals.

Planning applications.

Coulsdon Commons

3. **Kenley Common.** The Grade 2 listed building (Officers Mess) was destroyed by fire on Thursday 28th February. Arson is suspected but has not been confirmed has been confirmed, the police are continuing with their investigations.
4. **A232 - Pedestrian Crossing.**
Transport for London (TFL) are not yet in a position to submit their report to this committee. A contractor has been appointed to manage the project and

there are on-going discussions regarding the specification of materials. Thames Water will now need to be involved as the work requires them to relocate a district meter and pressure reduction valves in order for the works to proceed. TFL's report is now anticipated in May 2016.

PARTNERSHIPS

Kenley Revival update

5. Interviews to recruit the Project Manager were held on 12 February 2016. Four applicants were interviewed and an appointment has been made subject to satisfactory references and medical records. It is anticipated that the successful candidate will join the project in March 2016.
6. Interviews were conducted for the Learning and Vols Officer on 28th January. The post has been accepted by the successful candidate and commences in March.
7. Conservation Consultant. Three companies returned tenders and Avanti Architects scored highest. Approval to appoint is currently being sought from the Town Clerk and Chairman.
8. A meeting was held with the MOD and RAF to further discuss:
 - **Alterations to the route of the Heritage Path.** The MOD saw no immediate problems with the City's draft proposals and will provide formal feedback/confirmation at the next meeting.
 - **Safety barrier and signage options - when gliding is in operation.** Following positive discussions the MOD will now draw up their draft proposals. It is hoped that the MOD will then seek early planning advice from Croydon County Council and the support of local community prior to a full planning submission.
 - A further meeting is to be held in March 2016 to review progress and resolve issues arising from the above.
9. A meeting with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was held on 18th Feb 2016 to report progress. HLF authorised the appointment of the Project Manager and the Conservation Consultant. They acknowledge progress to date, but are keen to see a revised program and cash flow forecast in light of the delay caused by the appointment the Project Manager.

WORK PROGRAMME – HIGHLIGHTS

West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Commons

10. Contractors have completed further sections of grassland restoration on Riddlesdown and Farthing Downs. They will continue with a section of scrub management on Riddlesdown throughout February.
11. 12 Sussex calves were born from the breeding herd in the Barn at Merlewood Estate Office. This is the first time in over 10 years that the barns have been used in this way under the close daily supervision of the Livestock Ranger.

12. Volunteers at West Wickham & Spring Park contributed 60 hours removing dense holly from the understory of the oak woodland on West Wickham. The habitat will now be restocked with hazel, the more traditional species found in local woodlands.

Burnham Beeches

13. Restoration works on pollards was carried out by the Rangers team in January and February using a hired MEWP and with additional cooperative working with climbers for Hampstead heath for a week. Volunteers have been supporting rangers with scrub management on heathland & path edges at various locations around the site.
14. Volunteers have also supported the Conservation Officer in a range of survey work including looking at historical records for the site, undertaking a project to see if there is any relationship between soil conditions and the junipers that have canker on them and checking key colonies of the rare moss Zygodon and removing some competing moss growth if necessary. They have also continued to support the on-going visitor counts started late 2015. Local cubs and scouts turned out to support the Clean for Queen Litter pick event at the Beeches on the 5th of March.

Stoke Common.

15. Small scale contract heathland restoration work was carried out on the West Common in February – coppicing 0.5 ha of scrub and gorse. The Friends and other volunteers have been very busy working on the common and have just carried out a clean for the queen task on 5th March.
16. The Beeches' ponies will soon return to the West Common after a two month 'working holiday' grazing the heathland at Black Park – this local partnership has provided overwintering for the ponies, ensured they are doing a useful conservation task over the winter and reduced staff checking to once a week - with Black park staff doing day checks on or behalf – freeing BB staff time and reducing mileage associated with winter pony care..

Ashted Common.

17. This years' program of work on the veteran oak pollards has been completed, with 136 trees undergoing aerial work and 40 being 'low haloed'.
18. Scrub grassland restoration work has been undertaken by volunteers, staff and contractors across the lower slopes, and is now reaching completing for the season.
19. Volunteers have contributed an enormous amount of effort to clear the line for a new fence along the western boundary. Once in place, this fence will provide an additional line of containment along the most vulnerable side of the common to facilitate the introduction of an invisible fence system.

WINTER STORMS.

20. The storms of January and February had limited impact on The Commons open spaces, however, Burnham Beeches closed its car parks and café/info point to visitors for most of the day from 10.00am on Monday 1st February and for part of the day on Saturday the 6th February.
21. No significant loss of trees has been reported although a few small branches and small trees in quieter areas were lost. Any closure on a weekend day does adversely affect car park and cafe takings for that day.
22. Ashtead Common, West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons similarly, escaped significant damage with just a few small trees lost to the high winds.
23. In all instance following high winds the Division's operations teams conduct visual inspections of High and Medium Risk routes and locations. Any dangerous, fallen trees or debris is identified, mapped and subsequently made safe.

SUPPORT SERVICES.

24. The Support Services Team (SST) finalised their 'Team Charter' which includes details of team objectives, values, individual roles and responsibilities.
25. The Support Services Manager has designed a Learning and Development Plan for the SST to promote and enhance team working delivery of services to stakeholders. The plan provides a bespoke suite of learning resources that engage on an individual and team basis. promoting improved.

PERSONNEL

26. The PA to the Superintendent has decided not to return to work after a period of maternity leave and tendered her resignation on 1st February 2016. The Superintendent is now taking the opportunity to review the opportunities this might provide in terms of further strengthening the management team.
27. The Senior Ranger at Merlewood Estate Office is currently convalescing after breaking his ankle whilst working on Kenley Common and is expected to return to light duties in several weeks' time.
28. A member of the Ashtead Common team member has now completed a series of surgical procedures, and is currently convalescing and expected to return to light duties in three weeks.

INCIDENTS

29. **Farthing Downs.** Thieves stole a battery and safety box from a temporary electric fenced area on Farthing Downs. The area was being grazed as part of a trial of targeted management to achieve specific conditions. We are currently reviewing this approach.

30. **Riddlesdown.** A dog waste bin and bench were recently vandalised. The matter has been reported to the police.
31. **Burnham Beeches.** A letter of complaint was received in respect of DCO enforcement. The Head Ranger has responded identifying the programme of engagement opportunities and significant public education in aiding the enforcement of Dog Control Orders.
32. **Burnham Beeches.** A dog walker wrote a letter of thanks to the Burnham Beeches Rangers for their assistance in recovering their dog which had slipped its harness in the dogs on lead area and would not return to its owner.
33. **Ashted Common.** The Conservation Officer has met discussed the latest scrub, wood-pasture and veteran tree management with a local resident at Ashted Common, who has expressed concerns as to their need and scale.

FILMING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

34. The Conservation Officer was interviewed by Anne Diamond of Radio Berkshire on the work of the City of London at Burnham Beeches
35. The Head Ranger of Burnham Beeches hosted representatives from Surrey Wildlife Trust looking at invisible fencing.
36. The Conservation Officer hosted representatives of Natural England NNR managers from Bredon Hill and National Trust, Leigh woods, at Burnham Beeches looking at work on old pollards and grazing/invisible fencing.
37. A film unit has been at Burnham Beeches for 3 days filming and 3 days 'preparation and strike' generating an income of £17000 to the site

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