

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest & Commons	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
<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>	

## **PLANNING CONTROL**

### **Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common**

1. The hydrology protocol (designed to alert partners to problems) for the neighbouring gravel extraction site is still 'a work in progress'. Officers continue to press Buckinghamshire County Council (the Minerals Planning Authority) to resolve the outstanding issues and will continue to do so as a priority.
2. The issue of dust arising from the gravel extraction site has been raised with Natural England and their air quality specialist is preparing a 'recommendations report' which is due imminently.
3. A meeting was held between Natural England, South Bucks District Council and Summerleaze (gravel site owners/operative) to discuss the restoration of the gravel site and its potential use as a recreation area once operations have permanently ceased. The discussion was generally positive although there are many issues and barriers to resolve. Action points were agreed and another meeting is planned for July to discuss future joint working.
4. A meeting has been arranged in July with various specialists in Natural England to discuss issues relating to the impact of recreation on the features of European importance.

### **A232**

5. At the May meeting of this committee members approved the dedication of land to facilitate Transport for London's proposal to install a signalised pedestrian crossing on the A232 Croydon Road near Hartfield Crescent.

Members also requested that the Superintendent seek clarification on two issues, i.e.

***i. The existence of land owned either by TfL or Bromley Council that might be dedicated to The Commons in compensation of loss to highway.***

TfL has confirmed that whilst it does have a land bank the vast majority of these sites are 'brown field' and remote from The Commons.

TfL also checked their local assets in the area of the City Commons and confirmed that any assets are comprised of TfL's highways themselves and therefore not available for any land transfer to Common land.

Bromley Council confirmed that any land in their ownership adjacent to The Commons is either highway or is already common land and transfer would not be appropriate or necessary.

***ii. If the speed limit proposed at 40 mph could be further reduced.***

TfL responded as follows:

*Speed limits should be evidence-led and self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. They should encourage self-compliance."*

*The A232 Croydon Road in this location is semi-rural, which does not look or feel like a 30 mph road. It is an entirely different situation from the City of London's urban roads which were mentioned at the committee meeting. Enforcement action here to try and force drivers to follow the new speed limit would not be supported by the police as a reduced speed limit is not appropriate for the environment.*

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Kenley Revival update.**

6. **The volunteer programme** is underway and an additional 25 people signed up to be involved in the project at an open evening event in May.
7. **Project Champion** roles have been created to enable members of the community to support key areas of activity such as education, interpretation and conservation.
8. **Volunteer roles** will soon be advertised linked to project themes such as archiving, digitisation and web content creation.
9. **Oral history** recording has commenced following a training day for staff and volunteers in May.
10. **Outreach** to other organisations has commenced to explore opportunities to take the story of Kenley out to a wider audience at venues such as the Imperial War Museum.
11. **Over 100** young people have already been engaged through the project's education programme.
12. **The website** is now scheduled for launch at the end of June. Some content, such as education resources, will be added in subsequent months. A drone

will be used in July to provide aerial coverage to aid further interpretation of the site.

13. The RAF has consented to use of its crest in the design of the Kenley Revival Project logo.
14. **Conservation works** are scheduled to commence in August. The Conservation Consultant is currently formalising the tender documentation to select a suitable contractor. Safety systems are being developed to manage risks associated with asbestos and unexploded ordnance.

## **WORK PROGRAMME – HIGHLIGHTS.**

### **The Coulsdon Commons.**

15. The 'Chain Gang' volunteers have been working hard keeping the footpaths clear on Coulsdon Common. Boundaries have also been 'cut back' to deter fly tipping and garden waste.
16. The 'New Hillbillies' volunteers spent a second session clearing small dead bushes from open grassland on Farthing Downs. These bushes were weed wiped last year as part of the programme to control woody vegetation. This benefits grassland flowers like Common Dropwort, invertebrates like Common Blue butterfly, Glow-Worm and Roman Snail and ground nesting birds such as Skylark.
17. Riddlesdown Volunteers have put in steps to the site bothy to eliminate the potential hazard of slipping on the steep grass bank. They also spruced up the office by giving the front a new paint job, removing weeds from the steps and paving stones and treated the wooden facing of the tool store door. This community based approach to the care of the Riddlesdown bothy will continue and thereby reduce its maintenance and running costs.
18. The Ranger Team have been busy preparing all sites for the summer, including; site infrastructure checks, preparing contract specifications and leading a variety of well attended guided walks and talks.

### **The West Wickham Commons**

19. As a precautionary measure posters warning of the possible presence of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) have been erected. Through June and into July, rangers with binoculars will be scanning each branch of every oak tree for signs of the pest. This annual survey, which started in 2012, has so far indicated that Spring Park and West Wickham Common are free of OPM.

### **Burnham Beeches.**

20. The British White cows returned to Burnham Beeches in early May from their over wintering quarters. Some were moved into invisible fencing enclosures in early June. Once again the aim is to graze around 120 Ha within invisible

fence enclosures and approximately 45 hectares within the permanent fence enclosures. The Exmoor ponies are also back on site.

21. Successful events at the Beeches included -
  - 'Meet the ranger and his reptiles and amphibians' (180 visitors)
  - 'Half term trail' enjoyed by around 400 visitors, even with poor weather over the holiday week
  - 'Burnham Beeches at War' walk - poor weather affected attendance
  - Hosting various visits including one from National Trust Ashridge estate looking at veteran tree management and invisible fencing
  - The visit of the Lord Mayor to pollard a tree in celebration of the City's acquisition of Burnham Beeches in 1880

### **Stoke Common.**

22. Friends of Stoke Common/Burnham Beeches continued to deliver a 'whole site reptile survey' at Stoke Common during April and May. 10 areas were being surveyed and each requires a minimum of 7 visits of about 2 hours duration. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> year this survey has taken place and is indicating species recovery and expansion into areas restored to heathland over the last 8 years of the management plan.
23. Sussex cattle also returned to the Common in May (Main Common) and in June on the West Common.
24. As part of the Freshwater Habitat Trust's Flagship Ponds Project a pond at Stoke Common (one of the sites chosen for this nationwide project) were surveyed for Great Crested Newt (GCN) using an innovative 'E' DNA (E = Environmental) screening test which is able to detect the presence of GCN by analysis of pond water alone. A training day was held for volunteers to help deliver this project. Further work on the ponds at the Common will take place over the next 3 years - including work on the reintroduction and management of the rare Star-Fruit plant.

### **Ashted Common.**

25. Volunteers have commenced work to install a boundary fence along the entire western edge of the common. The fence is needed to support the future development of the conservation grazing programme.

### **Support Services.**

26. There has been an intense period of recruitment across the Division and a number of positions have now been successfully filled.
27. The Divisional Business Manager invited the Directorate Project Officer and Department Business Manager to join him in interviewing candidates for the vacant post of Support Services Officer at Merlewood Estate Office. Interviews have now concluded and the successful candidate is to join us on 4 July 2016.

28. Interviews for the position of Kenley Common Ranger have also concluded with the successful appointment joining us from Essex County Council.
29. Final rounds of interviews for the vacant post of Information Ranger at Coulsdon Commons are now complete and a candidate from the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has accepted a conditional offer of employment.
30. All are candidates bring fresh skills with them and we very much look forward to having a full complement of staff in the near future.

## **INCIDENTS**

### **Burnham Beeches**

31. None

### **Ashted Common.**

32. Two motorcycles were reported on the Common by a member of the public. The incident was reported to the local Police team by the Duty Ranger.

### **The Coulson Commons**

33. A lady was rescued from her flooded car by two Rangers following a torrential downpour.
34. Rangers discovered fly tipping adjacent to a property on Coulsdon Common. The owner had been spoken to several years ago about similar events and received a letter from the Head Ranger. The City's legal team are poised to prosecute if there is a repeat of the incident.
35. Rangers attended an incident involving two young children who had reportedly been throwing sticks at the cattle in the Grove. The ranger spoke with the two children who still had sticks in their hands and gently pointed out to them why they shouldn't be doing what they were doing. The two children were between the ages of 7 and 10.

### **Farthing Downs**

36. Rangers discovered an illegal camp in the woods on Farthing Downs. Four individuals were occupying a small tent in some scrub. When challenged they apologised claiming they were unaware of the byelaws. They cleared up the site and left within 15 minutes.

### **West Wickham Common**

37. A local resident reported seeing smoke coming from a stand of holly on West Wickham Common early one evening. A ranger and the fire brigade attended and put out the two small fires. The incident was reported to the Police who believe the fires were started by the same people who had built a camp at the same location several weeks earlier.
38. Rangers reported that two off road scramble motorcycles were seen on West Wickham Common. The details of the two bikes and a description of their

riders was given to the police who said they would step up their patrols in the area.

## **FILMING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

39. None.

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