

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest & Commons	12 <sup>th</sup> September 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 hydrological dipwells at the quarry site are now being measured regularly by Summerleaze and the information passed to the hydrologist for comment. So far they have not shown any response that can be attributed to the quarry workings.
2. Dust levels in and around Burnham Beeches continue to be at relatively high levels. Following advice from Natural England and the consultants it has been proposed to supplement the regular 'sticky pad' monitoring scheme with three 'frisbee gauges' which will enable dust to be measured in a quantitative way which is more comparable with levels known to be of concern to plant health. They will also allow a directional component to be measured. Purchase of a handheld device is also being explored in order to carry out real time measurements. An estimate of costs has been requested.
3. Progress is being made with South Bucks District Council regarding the provision of alternative green space for residents of new houses in the District. A report on this matter included in the September committee papers.
4. A meeting was held with Natural England specialists on recreation pressure and wood pasture to explore options for reducing the impact of visitors on the beech woodland. Further research was discussed and a simple method of assessing risk of harm where research is not viewed as being sufficient. NE agreed that Officers had done everything in their power to balance the needs of recreation and nature conservation and that options to extend the area of the site was likely to be the best long term solution.

## PARTNERSHIPS

### Kenley Revival update.

5. **Project plan has been revised** to make it more manageable and to focus on the outputs of the project. The project has been broken down into the following themes: Archaeology, Conservation, Digitisation & Archiving, Education, Events & Tours, Interpretation, Oral History and Website. This approach has been fully supported by HLF and is now being shared with other projects as a suitable methodology.
6. **Kenleyrevival.org has launched** with 5 volunteers trained in Wordpress to upload and manage content. The website will continue to develop over the lifetime of the project with online education resources to be uploaded and for the online archive to be launched by Winter 2016.
7. **A Kenley Revival project launch event** is to be held at **Heritage Day on 11<sup>th</sup> September** in the Portcullis Club field and airfield perimeter. The event includes a number of attractions including full size replica spitfire and Hurricane, a Battle of Britain exhibition trailer, 1940s food tasting, guided walks, land train tours and community stalls. This event has traditionally been organised by the Kenley Airfield Friends Group. The Commons team have been involved in overseeing the logistics and operational planning of the day and also to test the site's infrastructure (such as the location of the car parks and the introduction of a shuttle bus) as future events will be on a much larger scale during the lifetime of the Revival Project.
8. **Conservation works have been delayed** due to a lack of tender returns and an overall consensus that neither of the submissions were of acceptable standard. However, this does present opportunities to condense the works to a 1 year programme in 2017 and to better align onsite activities such as asbestos removal, material surveys and to relocate the Tribute prior to conservation works beginning onsite.
9. **A Project e-newsletter has been established** as a means of updating people and actively recruiting for volunteers. Around 500 people have already subscribed to the mailing list and Project Officers have worked closely with the Open Spaces Marketing and Development Officer to integrate branding and tone with the departmental style.

## WORK PROGRAMME – HIGHLIGHTS.

### The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons.

10. Staff and volunteers have been rewarded for their hard work through the year at each of the 6 sites by gaining Green Flag status for the 2016/17 season. Kenley Common and Farthing Downs also retained their "Green Heritage" status
11. The Coulsdon Common volunteers (the "Chain Gang") removed an old fence line in the area known as 'The Grove'. This area is being managed as wood

pasture and in September 2015, a new fence line was put in to extend the grazing area, so that the herd of Sussex cattle could roam amongst the scrub and begin to bring it under control.

12. Rangers, volunteers and school children have been hard at work on all 4 of the Coulsdon Commons pulling ragwort ready for hay making and grazing. Several groups of volunteers have been working on Farthing Downs helping with the annual task to control ragwort. BTCV, Allianz Assistance and Croydon Conservation Volunteers have all been involved.
13. Hay making has started on the Coulsdon Commons, with harvesting taking place on Kenley, Riddlesdown, Farthing Downs and Coulsdon. As well as helping to manage the valued landscapes of the Coulsdon Commons under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, this operation provides feed for the herd of Sussex cattle during the winter months.
14. The Ranger Team have been busy maintaining the sites including; infrastructure checks, preparing contract specifications and tendering for the winter works programme and leading a variety of well attended guided walks and talks.
15. Volunteers recently installed a new bench on West Wickham Common. Carefully positioned alongside the all-weather pathway, the bench will soon provide views across the heathland landscape. This work forms part of the on-going heathland restoration project that is transforming the centre of the Common into a more open and accessible place.

### **Burnham Beeches.**

16. Burnham Beeches received its 13<sup>th</sup> successive Green Flag and 12th Green Heritage award in July 2016.
17. The lease for the Burnham Beeches café has been extended for a further three years under delegated authority. External advice was sought as to the value of the lease and an uplift was not felt to be appropriate. The value of the lease therefore remains the same as for the last three year period
18. The contract to administer the car park administration process has been extended for a further three years under delegated authority. This contract produces an annual income to the City and the model therefore remains good value for money.
19. Cows grazed in Invisible fences for the 5<sup>th</sup> grazing season this year with cattle grazing around 30Ha at the Moat and Pumpkin Hill during June and July. They will be returned to invisible fence areas of around 90 Ha at the start of September.
20. Volunteers have helped repair and improve the surface of over 200m of paths around the Beeches and supported the summer work programme which includes bracken control and cyclical cutting of Young Pollards.

21. Successful events at the Beeches included -
- 'A summer holiday self-guided trail - running throughout the holiday period - many hundreds of people participated.
  - Family events were held every Tuesday during August; along with Meet the Ranger and Woodland Wonder events. Approximately 450 visitors participated.
  - Burnham Beeches hosted an 'invisible fence day' for organisations interested in using the technique in the near future.
  - Two staff and a volunteer attended a National Trust 'Ranger Day' at their nearby property, Cliveden and ran two short veteran tree management workshops.
  - Interesting plants continue to be found in Burnham Beeches this year. The latest additions to the list are *Trifolium arvense* (Hare's-foot clover) on the café roof, the first record for Burnham Beeches since 1926 although seen near Burnham village in 2011. Also *Geranium rotundifolium*, last seen in the Beeches in 1954.
  - Butterfly transects are being carried out weekly across Burnham Beeches this summer as usual. The Conservation Office was recently mentioned in an article in the Butterfly conservation magazine as being 8<sup>th</sup> in the list of people walking the longest distance doing butterfly transects. The total distance walked was 3,303km or equivalent to 80 London Marathons!
  - The visitor count survey was completed after many days of work between October 2015 and August 2015. Volunteers' assistance was essential to achieve this project. Data analysis results are expected in December 2016.

### **Stoke Common.**

22. Friends of Stoke Common have helped re-surface pathways and run an open day in July and August, aimed at attracting new volunteers and promoting the importance of the common, and are preparing for the winter habitat restoration works starting in September.
23. The success of the restoration work to date was reflected in sightings and nesting successes for Woodlark, Dartford warbler Stonechat and Skylark. Hobbies have again been seen over the common in the summer months.
24. Work on the common during the summer has been restricted to wildlife survey activity, fence repairs, bracken control and the always popular pine seedling pulling!

### **Ashted Common.**

25. Four nests containing caterpillars of the Oak Processionary Moth were discovered on three trees near to a Forestry Commission pheromone trap near Craddocks Avenue and the A24. These were removed by vacuuming them off. A comprehensive survey programme involving specialist contractors and volunteers has been developed to monitor for further outbreaks.

26. Ashtead Common received its 14th successive Green Flag and 9th Green Heritage award in July 2016.

### **Support Services.**

27. The Division now has a full complement of staff with the Support Services Officer, Kenley Ranger and Information Ranger all now in post. They bring a new dynamic to the team and we are very pleased to finally have them with us.
28. Correspondence was received praising the conduct of one of our Administration Officers and for 'going the extra mile'.
29. An Ashtead Ranger is a reservist in the armed forces and has completed a four month tour of service on the Falkland Islands. He returned to work at the end of August.
30. An Ashtead Ranger is due to go on maternity leave at the end of September. Her position provides a development opportunity for a member of the Burnham Beeches team during her anticipated 12 month period of absence.
31. A temporary Ranger's post has been filled at Burnham Beeches to cover the above. The successful applicant has previously worked at the Beeches as a seasonal ranger.
32. A review of Ranger Rotas is being undertaken to examine the potential to achieve greater consistency across the Division and seek improved efficiencies.

## **INCIDENTS**

### **Burnham Beeches**

33. In August the Beeches café was robbed at closing time by a man in a balaclava carrying a knife who made his escape on a mountain bike. It is believed that two other individuals were involved and waiting nearby. No one was hurt and a police investigation is ongoing.
34. In August a neighbour reported coming across a man who appeared to be attempting suicide in his car (hose pipe, exhaust) at the end of her driveway that forms part of Burnham Beeches. The man drove away and the matter was reported to the Police who later reported that he had returned safely to his family.
35. A car was driven through site access gate 5 at Stoke Common and set on fire. Livestock were present on site, Rangers attended and made the site secure. Police and fire service dealt with fire and vehicle removal within 12 hrs.
36. Other incidents dealt with were of a fairly minor nature but included dealing with small fires, motorbikes and 4WD off road on site, 2 incidents of dogs not under being kept under effective control /DCO and two incidents of neighbours dumping garden waste. All required follow up action.

### **Ashtead Common.**

37. None

### **The West Wickham and Coulson Commons**

38. Rangers were called to an incident on Kenley Common involving a member of the public who had taken his own life. Details of the individual and his motives are not clear. The police are currently unable to provide further details.
39. Rangers apprehended a man driving his 4x4 across Farthing Downs. The man became aggressive when requested to give personal details. He was reported to the local police and he has not been seen again.
40. Rangers filled a 'pick up' of fly tipped garden waste from the "Folly" on Farthing Downs.
41. Vandals removed several panels from the fence surrounding the quarry on Riddlesdown in order to gain access to the site. The gap has been repaired. This section of the fence is being replaced this autumn under the City Surveyors Additional Works Programme.
42. A small was fire was found in the woodland at the edge of West Wickham Common. The fire brigade attended. Rangers have renewed their notices regarding open fires and BBQ's

#### **FILMING, MAJOR EVENTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

43. None.

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