

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons	16 th January 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>	

Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

1. The winter work programme on 80 old pollards is now underway with clearance of scrub and trees around them to create space and give light to encourage growth after pruning works commencing January 2017.
2. All cattle are off the site and on various Autumn/Winter grazing pastures locally. The herd size has been increased to nine with three animals recently purchased locally from Odds Farm. All three cows are pedigree British Whites with good temperaments.
3. The end of season cut to push back scrub on the restored heath and edges of open grass at Burnham Beeches is complete. The cutting of sight lines on road edges has also been completed. Heathland mowing is underway to provide a mosaic of gorse and heather to benefit a wide range of species.
4. There were two public events; the autumn colours walk (15 walkers) and the monthly 'Simply Walk' (18 walkers). Rangers also led a walk for 70 children and staff from the local Farnham Common Junior School.
5. Acidic grassland restoration work is complete for 2016/17 with 20 man days felling of secondary birch woodland done.
6. The ever popular Christmas Carol service was held at the Burnham Beeches Café and the event was very well attended. Rangers and volunteers also provided the now traditional birch Christmas tree.

Stoke Common

6. Contractors have replaced 550 metres of fencing on the eastern side of the main common.
7. A contractor was brought in to assist with heathland restoration works on the North Common, 20 person days covering 0.2 hectares of felling undertaken.
8. The Exmoor Ponies have been grazing on the West Common to target some of the gorse and break up compartments of even age structure. They will be moved to Black Park in January to graze the heathland there under licence with Bucks Country Council.
9. Rangers and volunteers provided the traditional birch Christmas Tree.
10. Stoke Common and Burnham Beeches volunteers and staff celebrated the winter solstice and Christmas period with an evening get together of food and games.

PARTNERSHIPS

Kenley Revival update.

11. The Conservation Works re-tender is now live with a deadline of 13th January. A site visit and procurement presentation was carried out on 8th December. We are currently awaiting clarification on the source of bricks which is now the responsibility of the project rather than the contractor in order to de-risk this element. The removal of asbestos from KC52 has been finalised with the contractor with a 'watching brief' to be delivered in tandem with works onsite. Unexploded Ordnance - also for a 'watching brief' is currently being drafted.
12. The Interpretation Works tender is now live with a deadline of 13th January. A site visit was held on Wednesday 5th December with 6 suppliers. The works require provision of up to 50 signs and includes the renewal of the 11 existing interpretation boards. It also includes the design and manufacture of the travelling exhibition.
13. The Tribute Relocation Works tender deadline was the 2nd December. Site visits were conducted on 15th and 17th November. Consent to appoint the preferred contractor was given by the Heritage Lottery Fund partners before Christmas.
14. Planning application decision by Croydon Council is still awaited. They have asked for further conceptual drawings. This is the largest risk to the capital works programme at this stage.

15. The Education Resource Designer re-tender was successful with Jade Design now appointed. They will deliver the self-guided walks, quiz trails, World War II display and loan boxes.
14. Human Resources has been flagged as the other significant risk to the project. The Project Board has sought advice from HLF with regards to restructuring the Activity Plan to accommodate more staff time. In this manner any additional staff costs can be met directly by the grant. This change has been approved by HLF.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

16. Volunteers and staff put on their waders and cleared dense vegetation to restore some open water habitat at of the ponds in Stites Hill Wood, Coulsdon Common. If left unmanaged, ponds can quickly dry out as trees and grass remove the water that is so vital to the organisms which live within the pond. The ponds are home to a large population of breeding frogs and smooth newts. In spring 2017 an amphibian survey is planned at these ponds to improve our knowledge of amphibian populations.
17. The Kenley Volunteers have been clearing holly and coppicing hazel in the understory of the woodland between Main Common and Seven Acre. This will allow more light to reach the woodland floor encouraging more diverse ground flora. It will also help to protect the bigger oaks and beech trees which are important veterans, by reducing competition for light and space from the smaller trees.
18. Volunteers from the Pension Protection Fund in Croydon helped us continue work clearing scrub at the Grove on Coulsdon Common. They removed dense holly and hawthorn allowing sunlight to reach the ground for the first time in years. Their reward was to see warmth-loving red admiral and speckled wood butterflies basking in the dappled light. Hopefully the volunteers will return later this autumn to see the cattle grazing this pleasant area of wood pasture.
19. Volunteers from the London Open University Geological Society (LOUGS) spent a geo-conservation day at Riddlesdown quarry. They started clearing scrub to expose significant features for which the site is best known. The Riddlesdown Quarry is one of the few remaining Chalk exposures of the "*Lewes Nodular Chalk Formation*" in this part of the North Downs.
10. Archaeologists from Heritage England and our ranger team met at West Wickham Common to have a closer look at the earthwork. We discussed opportunities for a community dig to investigate the history of the West Wickham Common earthwork. There are many unanswered questions about the earthwork. There is speculation it might have been an unfinished Iron Age Hill Fort, part of a medieval field system or used as an artificial warren. The West Wickham community dig will be a community focused project which aims to answer some of these questions. It will give the local community the

opportunity to be involved in digging test trenches on the earthwork under professional supervision. Furthermore participants can be involved in working with the archaeological finds from these investigations. This is a joint project with Heritage England. £1,500 has been identified from local risk to meet the costs of the volunteer involvement.

21. Successful events at the WW&CCs included-

- **Fungi Walk on Coulsdon Common:** Local expert Jane Mclaughlin led yet another fantastic walk around Coulsdon Common looking at the huge variety of Fungi that can found here. Autumn is the best time for year for finding fungi and a total of 37 species were found in our 2 hour walk including; False Deathcap, Giant Polypore, Chicken of the Woods and Yellow Stagshorn.
- **Rudolph the Reindeer:** Families came to the Merlewood Estate Office to participate in the Rudolph the Reindeer event. The families were welcomed by our giant Rudolph in front of the office. We had a festive afternoon where the families had the opportunity to create their own small wooden Rudolph out of materials from the Commons.
- **Meet the Ranger** at West Wickham Common 20th November
- **Fire lighting and den-building** with the ranger, Riddlesdown Common 19th November.
- **A Christmas Trail** with the rangers on Kenley Common 11th December.

Ashtead Common

22. 1014 volunteer hours were achieved in October bringing the total to over 9000 for the year. This month's figures included contributions from a corporate group from Exxon Mobil and the Lower Mole Partnership.
23. The winter work programme is progressing well, with veteran tree, scrub management and ride/ firebreak works in full swing.
24. The Ashtead Team have been exploring potential partners to provide conservation grazing from next year onwards. A continuation of the existing arrangement using animals from the Merlewood herd was considered alongside two new potential providers: a local farmer specialising in conservation grazing and the Surrey Wildlife Trust. A partnership with Surrey Wildlife Trust is considered to be the best option due to their developing knowledge of the 'Dog Fence' invisible fencing system, and excellent risk management arrangements. The likely annual cost will be £4,000.
25. An invitation to tender has been issued to install a new water supply to the north-western part of the Common. This will feed drinking troughs in that area,

and potentially further across the common as low intensity conservation grazing is expanded in future years.

Support Services

26. The Support Service's Team has had a busy period assisting with organising various Halloween and Christmas themed events including pumpkin carving, 'Carols at the Cafe', 'Make your own Rudolph' and various Christmas trails. All have proven to be incredibly popular with the local community.
27. Long term sickness absence continues with two members of staff continues to be of concern
28. The team organised and hosted the Open Spaces staff visit to Burnham Beeches and participated in the day which concluded with a session hosted by the Department Learning Team's on the theme of 'Learning through play'.
29. The PA to the Superintendent, and the Support Services Officer at Merlewood Estate Office have completed their probation and have now joined the team on a permanent basis.
30. The Conservation Ranger at Coulsdon Common has retired and the future use of this post is being considered before being re-advertised.
31. An Ashted Ranger resigned his post which is currently being advertised

INCIDENTS

Burnham Beeches

32. Dog Control Orders (DCO) – a local dog walker has been sent a final warning letter regarding dog control. Further incidents will lead to a Fixed Penalty Notice.
33. DCO, Byelaw and Physical/Verbal abuse – a local dog walker was seen to breach two DCO's as his dogs were chasing deer, he refused to give identification details and verbally abused a member of staff who witnessed and dealt with the offences. The matter is currently with the City Solicitor and Thames Valley Police. The serious nature of the offences means that it is not appropriate to take the Fixed Penalty Notice route for the DCO offences but to deal with the matter in a Magistrates Court. The offender has been sent a letter warning of the City's intention to prosecute. The offender has previously, repeatedly and actively objected to the introduction of DCO's on the site.
34. A vehicle was found to be blocking access to Sir Henry Peeks Drive. The owner was spoken to.
35. Entry was gained to a vehicle on Lord Mayors Drive car park. No contents were stolen.

36. 4 car park machines were vandalised in early December. They were made operational by the rangers with final repairs undertaken by the service contractor.

Ashtead Common

37. An accident involving a tree surgery contractor caused minor injuries to two members of the public. The accident was fully investigated by both the contractor and the City Corporation. A number of improvements in the contractors' safety systems including more training for operatives and investment in communications equipment have been undertaken.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

38. A large number of gas canisters & oxyacetylene tanks were fly tipped on the bridleway along the Western boundary of the Grove, Coulsdon Common. The tanks were removed to the estate yard for collection by a licenced waste contractor at a cost of £2,500.
39. The main Merlewood Estate Office gate was hit by a minibus that was turning in the driveway. The driver had become blinded by the low sun and failed to see the gate in his mirrors. The minibus company have agreed to pay for the damage to the gate which included the replacement of a sensor.

FILMING, MAJOR EVENTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

40. Filming took place for 2 days for the Christmas Special of the BBC comedy "Outnumbered" which was screened on 26 December 2016.

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