

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest and Commons Committee.	20 Nov 2017
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Public</b>
Superintendent's Update	
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>For Information</b>
Superintendent of The Commons	
<b>Summary</b>	
<p>This report provides an update on issues across the nine sites within The Commons Division that may be of general interest to Members and is supplementary to the monthly email updates.</p>	
<b>Recommendation(s)</b>	
<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents of this report</li> </ul>	

## **Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common**

### **East Burnham Gravel Extraction**

1. The quarry site at East Burnham has continued to operate and the associated monitoring of the ground water hydrology and dust has continued. High dust levels were recorded on one occasion at a monitoring station between the Beeches and the quarry. This may be due to various works at one of the nearby houses.
2. The operative from the quarry site, Summerleaze Ltd. who carry out the regular hydrology monitoring is unavailable to carry out his role and a few monitoring sessions have been missed. An interim solution has been found and the Minerals Planning Authority notified so that they are aware that the situation was not resolved as smoothly as it should have been. Some hydrology monitoring points are currently recording very low levels but it is considered unlikely that this is related to quarry operations.

### **Air Quality**

3. Some progress has been made regarding mitigating the negative impact of various external plans and projects on air quality in Burnham Beeches due to increasing vehicle traffic. City of London Officers have proposed some solutions and these are currently being discussed by the relevant planning authorities.

### **Planning**

4. Slough Borough Council (SBC) has produced a report proposing a major housing development on land in the neighbouring South Bucks District Council (SBDC) area. This plan is being opposed by SBDC as the same land has

previously been evaluated by them and considered to be inappropriate for development. While not adjacent to the Beeches this does have the potential to cause significant extra pressure on the nature reserve and to Stoke Common SSSI.

### **Ecological Training and Monitoring**

5. A contractor commissioned by Natural England (NE) completed a survey of 50 permanent vegetation monitoring plots, repeating some work carried out 6 years ago. This is part of the Long Term Monitoring Network co-ordinated by NE and papers relating to this are now available on their website.
6. A guided walk was held for specialists attending the European Champion Trees Forum meeting at Kew Gardens. Twenty national experts discussed the ancient pollarded trees and their management.
7. Staff training events were held on the themes of 'Flies of Stoke Common' and 'Pond Management at Burnham Beeches'. Both of these resulted from surveys and reports from experts in their field, in 2016.
8. Volunteers from Burnham Beeches and the Friends of Stoke Common were taken on a trip to Thursley Common NNR in Surrey to look at heathland management on a similar reserve. This trip is part of our preparation for the new Stoke Common management plan that will be developed in 2018 and forms part of the early engagement of our volunteers.

### **Tree safety and Pollard Programme**

9. The ranger team completed work on the young pollards, cutting this year's batch of trees, many of which have now been managed in this manner for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time. They also undertook summer tree safety work and then switched to heathland restoration and the 'old pollard programme' in September.

### **Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs)**

10. PSPOs came into effect at Burnham Beeches on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2017. Rangers have erected new signage to reflect the change. A new information leaflet has also been produced.

### **Volunteers**

11. The Burnham Beeches volunteers carried out path improvement works in August. They switched to heathland restoration in September on the wetland and mires, removing invasive scrub whilst ground conditions were relatively dry.

### **Stoke Common**

12. The Friends of Stoke Common (FOSC) have continued with their monthly tasks by removing young pine trees from areas of established heathland habitat.
13. Start dates for larger scale restoration work by contractors have been agreed. Works on the North and Main Commons have commenced. Work will start on the West Common in February 2018.

### **Kenley Revival Project (KRP) Update**

14. The Conservation Works programme is nearing completion. Use of part of the contingency budget was agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund to meet

additional costs as a result of the poorer than expected condition of some of the heritage features.

15. The final works will also include graffiti removal on the rifle range and the replacement of geotextile to prevent soil erosion on the blast pens.
16. An Events Apprentice has been recruited and started work on 25<sup>th</sup> September. This additional post will support the Project Team and Volunteers and will help to develop and deliver the 218/18 Events Programme and other elements of the Project.
17. The website and archive was launched and enables the public to contribute stories and photographs of RAF Kenley. A drop in 'Antiques Road Show' will be held in November to encourage the public to photograph and upload their items to the archive.
18. 'Sky Heroes', the largest event in the life of the project took place on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September with 5000 visitors attending. Media coverage was exceptional and included several live TV and radio broadcasts before and during the event.
19. The planning application for signage works will be submitted in the next quarter with the aim at this stage to install the onsite signage by Easter 2018.
20. The project's Education Volunteers were shortlisted for a 'Team London Award'. The Award Ceremony took place on 6<sup>th</sup> November at City Hall and Project Officers, Volunteers and the Superintendent attended.

#### **Key KRP achievements to date**

- 10,000 members of the public including schools, engaged onsite in activities
- 7,000 users to the website since its relaunch on 1st August 2017
- 8,000 impressions for the most popular tweet to date – Sky Heroes
- 8,000 people reached on Facebook for the Sky heroes event
- 561 subscribers to the newsletter
- 658 volunteers have contributed their time to the project over a period of 2017 days
- A professional 'fighter station network' has been established with other, similar sites

#### **The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons**

21. Coulsdon Common: Sutton and East Surrey Water have plans to install a new water main adjacent to the Common on States Hill Road. The majority of the work will take place on the highway but a license will be issued where the works impact on the Open Space. The work is due to commence in early December and will be completed in late January 2018.

#### **Kenley Common**

22. The new Military Aviation Authority (MAA) Regulatory Article 1026 (Aerodrome Operator) is now effective on Kenley Airfield. This new status brings the site into what is termed 'in scope', effectively meaning that the legislation that covers all other military air bases in the UK, including health and safety standards, now apply at Kenley airfield.
23. The Ministry of Defence have informed the Superintendent that they intend to submit a planning application related to the installation of a permanent safety

barrier to govern access to the MOD land, at the perimeter of the airfield. It is understood that this new barrier will replace the temporary and often ineffective barrier that has been in position for several years. It is further understood that the planning application will include proposals to replace the headquarters of the Volunteer Gliding Squadron. The Superintendent and KRP Project Partners attended a public meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> November. The matter is likely to require a specific report to this committee in the near future.

24. The Superintendent laid a wreath on behalf of the City Corporation at the Remembrance Service held on Kenley Airfield on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Happy Valley**

25. Croydon Council is consulting on the future of their remaining Open Spaces including the Happy Valley, a popular and biodiverse landscape that directly connects Coulsdon Commons to Farthing Downs. Local concern has been expressed with regard to the potential impacts of any commercial exploitation of Croydon's Open Spaces. The Croydon Advertiser recently carried an article on the matter and mentions the City's management of the adjoining Farthing Downs and Coulsdon Common and suggests that they would be badly impacted by Croydon's proposals should they be adopted. Croydon Council have not approached the City Corporation for a formal view on the matter. The Superintendent intends to contact Croydon Council to gain a better understanding of the issues and any potential impacts on the City's local Open Spaces.

### **Volunteers**

26. Volunteers have completed 370 hours across the Coulsdon Commons in September carrying out various tasks including fence clearance in the grove on Coulsdon Common, haymaking on West Wickham Common and scrub clearance along the horse ride on Farthing Downs. Ragwort pulling on Farthing Downs finished at the end of August. Rangers and several volunteer groups pulled more than 10 tonnes of ragwort this year.

### **Tree Safety Programme**

27. Rangers have started the annual programme of tree safety works across the Commons having previously completed the 'Medium Tress Safety Inspections'.

### **ASHTEAD COMMON**

#### **Volunteers and Contractors**

28. A team of 35 Corporate Volunteers from Exxon Mobil helped to improve the fire break network by cutting back the vegetation. This partnership is in its 10<sup>th</sup> year.
29. Volunteers and contractors commenced work to manage the scrub adjacent to the rides. Results from this summer's butterfly surveys are encouraging and indicate that the scalloping of edges along the rides is having a positive impact.
30. As part of the Division's volunteer development programme the Ashtead Common Volunteers visited Burnham Beeches and enjoyed a guided tour of the site and lunch. 34 Volunteers and staff participated in the visit.
31. Contractors for Network Rail have commenced work to upgrade power supply equipment at the railway sub-station. The City received £1000 for granting the license that allowed access across the Common to carry out the works.

## **SUPPORT SERVICES**

32. Interviews were conducted to employ a new Administration Assistant for the Merlewood and Ashtead Offices. The successful applicant started in her new role on 6<sup>th</sup> November.
33. The team has coordinated the Division's response to the Chamberlain concerning the September Estimates and reductions to the 2018/19 'Original' budgets'.
34. The team continues to provide essential administration support to the Kenley Revival Project and have played a key role in the success of this project to date.

## **INCIDENTS**

### **Burnham Beeches**

35. There were 18 report incidents during the period of which five related to fly tipping around the Beeches. Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) successfully prosecuted two people for dumping waste close to the boundary of the Beeches with fines and costs totalling just over £4,000. BCC and Thames Valley Police are currently investigating a number of fly tips of a very similar nature on and around the Beeches. Rangers are providing evidence.
36. There were 4 dog related incidents. Two where loose dogs intimidated visitors with children and one report of a lost dog that was found on site later that day. The owner of the lost dog has received a warning letter under the Public Space Protection Orders as this was the second incident with this dog. The fourth incident concerned a violent attack by one dog walker upon another. The incident was witnessed in part by staff and volunteers and also captured by the café's CCTV. The victim is reported to have sustained facial injuries, grazes, bruising and broken ribs. The matter is currently being investigated by Thames Valley Police who have taken statements and other evidence from the local team.
37. The remaining incidents were relatively minor and included vandalism of fences, fungi picking and two car break ins.

### **Ashtead Common**

38. The draft report on the archaeological investigation conducted at the Earthworks Scheduled Ancient Monument in August, has been received. The archaeologists were unable to come to any conclusions that might help put the illegally disturbed bronze objects in context. However, a number of interesting finds were made that indicate that the site was permanently settled during the mid to late Bronze Age period.

### **The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons**

39. Coulsdon Common – Travellers entered Coulsdon Common on the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> October and departed in the early hours of the following morning. The Head Ranger and local Police managed the issue and bailiffs were not required on this occasion. Further ditching works will be undertaken as part of the overall plan to ensure that the Common is less vulnerable to this type of incident.
40. Coulsdon Common – Two dogs attacked a roe deer. The incident was reported to Surrey Police and East Coulsdon Safe Neighbourhood Team (SNT). Witness statements were taken and further action by the police is awaited.
41. Coulsdon Common – a large double sofa was fly tipped on the football pitch adjacent to the Fox Public house. The sofa was removed.

42. Farthing Downs – Two separate incidents where cars became stuck in the ditch along Ditches Lane.
43. Kenley Common – a tree fell into a neighbour's garden during high winds in September and caused minor damage to their fence. An insurance claim against the City is pending.
44. Spring Park – motorcyclists were reported on the site. The SNT were informed.

## **FILMING AND MAJOR EVENTS.**

### **Burnham Beeches**

45. One day of filming took place providing an income of £4,600.
46. Six woodland wonders events took place and were very well attended.
47. Eleven other events were held including, 4 Simply Walks, a community bear hunt, a 'Creatures of the night' walk, a buggy walk and the ever popular 'On Location' filming walk.
48. Local schools recommenced their activity programmes following the summer break with regular visits to the site including cross country runs.

### **The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons**

49. Coulsdon Common – Meet the Ranger and 'Tree Identification' events were held.
50. Farthing Downs and New Hill – 'Meet the Ranger' and 'woodland and fungi walk' events were held.
51. Spring Park – A 'Bat walk' was held for local Brownies. A talk about the Commons was delivered to Addiscombe Rotary Club and a fire lighting/bush crafts event was provided for Beckenham Cubs.

### **Ashted Common**

52. The annual 10k race took place and attracted a large number of spectators and participants to the Common
53. A Charity Bike ride was held.
54. Event organisers are actively encouraged to confine their events to the early autumn months due to deteriorating ground conditions in later months.

### **Andy Barnard. Superintendent of the Commons**

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