

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest & Commons	14 May 2018
<b>Subject:</b> Superintendent's Update	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of 'The Commons'	<b>For Information</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Summary</b></p> <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> <p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>Members are asked to note the contents of this report.</p>	

## **Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common**

1. The quarry site at East Burnham continued to operate intermittently and the associated monitoring of the ground water hydrology and dust has continued. Neither the hydrology six monthly report, nor the annual report on the dust levels, raised any issues of concern.
2. South Bucks District Council (SBDC) are expecting the draft a report regarding air quality issues soon. Production of the local plan is likely to be slightly delayed, partly because of this extra work. Unfortunately, the Senior Planning Policy Officer who we have been working with over the last few years is retiring at the end of May. We are hoping to meet with her successor to do a detailed handover before she does. South Bucks and Chiltern District Councils are combining their Planning Departments and there is some staff turnover which, possibly, may be a positive opportunity. Officers are trying to organise a training/awareness raising session with them before the end of May.
3. A meeting was held with the Head of Parks for Slough Borough Council (SBC) which explored options for joint working. The Head of Parks does not work in the Planning Department but seems to have a better understanding of the issues affecting the SAC than the SBC planners and has agreed to help where she can. Opportunities for working together include advertising Slough Parks as places for local people to walk their dogs and joint projects to promote volunteering opportunities.

4. The Superintendent and Conservation Officer were present at an extremely well attended public meeting was held by Farnham Parish. The main aim of the meeting was to gauge opinion regarding the Parish Council talking to potential developers in the pre-application stage of projects. The strong feeling of the Parishioners present was that the PC should resist development of the green belt and not talk to developers in advance of submitting planning permission. However, more affordable housing was preferred on brownfield sites. There was a proposal from the PC to start production of a neighbourhood plan. Officers have since been in contact with the PC to reiterate that any plan would need to have a Habitats Regulations Assessment carried out.
5. The Countryside Stewardship Grant 'expression of interest' for Burnham Beeches/Stoke Common was submitted prior to the deadline and Officers understand that it has passed to the evaluation stage with no issues requiring clarification. Discussions continue with our Natural England Officer regarding the information required for the full application (deadline of 31 August) as it is still not clear exactly what information or actions are needed for some elements and the work could be substantial.
6. The toilet block at Burnham Beeches has been twinned with a latrine at Hton Htu, Kachin State Myanmar. This was a partnership project with the local inner Wheel Club of Burnham to support Tearfund the 'flush away poverty' Charity.
7. Work has continued for the revision of the Stoke Common Management Plan. – staff have held a number of consultation events including with volunteers, staff and 'experts'. Public drop in consultation dates have been arranged for late afternoons/evenings of 19 and 21 June 2018 and further site visits organised with various interested stakeholders. A working draft has been put together and is being used to guide the content of the public consultation and Countryside Stewardship application. Members are asked to note these dates and are assured of a warm welcome should attendance be possible.
8. At Stoke Common – the Friends of Stoke Common and other volunteers are undertaking a whole site reptile survey during April and May. This is now the 6<sup>th</sup> year the survey has run, and the data accumulated is providing very useful information on the spread of species following restoration work at the Common.
9. The Volunteers have also resurfaced paths, pulled rhododendron re-growth, cleared drainage grips, sorted ecological records onto databases and built a fantastic hollow log pile at Stoke Common as part of regular weekday and weekend tasks.
10. The Team completed all habitat work 'tidy ups' and tree safety works during March. Fencing repairs have been undertaken at both sites and despite late and unseasonal snow fall, on two separate occasions, the poor weather didn't hold up regular work programmes unduly as quick thaws following the cold weather.

11. The three Exmoor ponies have come back from overwintering at other local wildlife sites and will return to the Beeches along with the cows in mid-May. At the Beeches the Cows will be used in the invisible fencing loops again this summer.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Kenley Revival update**

12. The conservation work to restore the blast lens and rifle range has encountered brick and mortar faults and is currently under investigation by our conservation architects, 'Avanti'. Brick and mortar samples have been sent for laboratory analysis and a meeting with Avanti and the builders 'PAYE' is due week commencing 30 April 2018, following the results. The site has been assessed in terms of health and safety and KC12 and the original spine wall have been fenced off as a precaution. All stakeholders have been notified and are aware of the position.
13. The recently recruited Learning & Volunteer Officer has started in her role. Her priorities are to deliver school workshops and tours, which have been on hold, and deliver a programme of activities in June and November 2018. The new Officer will also be revising the education workshops along with assisting with archaeology and legacy planning activities.
14. Community Archaeology will be held 16-18 July 2018 with 15 volunteers. The 19 July will be for Open Spaces staff, as part Culture Board schedule of events, with a public day of tours and activities held on 21 July. A further week of community archaeology with more volunteers and, hopefully, experienced archaeology groups will take place 23 – 27 July. This dig will be led by MoLA (Museum of London).
15. The 'Women at War' season was successful with a sold-out theatre show, pop up Home Front event and school workshops held. The next programme will be a smaller version of the 'Learning Festival' which will focus on delivering workshops in local libraries to schools and informal audiences.
16. A legacy Project Initiation Document (PID) is being developed to assess and options that will deliver activities after the project has ended in May 2019. A management and maintenance plan has already been agreed.
17. The final formal event under the project banner will be the Conservation Seminar which will take place in February 2019 at the City Livery Hall.
18. The project has successfully achieved all its volunteer contributions for the project including the financial contribution with over 912 contributions delivering 259 days of volunteering.

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

19. Contractors are carrying out high risk tree safety works across all the Coulsdon Commons.
20. The vacant post for the position of Livestock Ranger was re-advertised and interviews were recently held.
21. Southern Railway continue to work on the railway bridge on Riddlesdown Common. These works are expected to continue for another month and in the meantime the bridge can only be accessed on foot.
22. The cattle have now returned from Epping Forest and are currently at the Merlewood Estate Office yard. The 59-head herd will remain in the yard until ground and grass conditions improve. We currently have a number of Jacob sheep grazing Bunker Bank on Kenley Common.
23. Thames Water is currently on site on Farthing Downs and are attending to a pipe which has caused a blockage to the sewer.
24. The Sweet Chestnut coppicing on Spring Park has been completed and the resultant timber moved from site once the ground conditions improve enough to allow to do so.
25. Infrastructure checks will be undertaken during the month of April and any issues will be highlighted.
26. A new ride on mower has been purchased and this will be used across the Coulsdon Commons and will assist in the creation and maintenance of variable sward types and heights.

## **Ashted Common**

27. Oak Processionary Moth nests identified in recent surveys have been removed and spraying of infested trees will commence shortly. These will be the infected trees, (not the 50m zones as before) and only then if the tree is in a high-risk zone. This reflects the approach taken by nearby Richmond Park.
28. Twelve Surrey Wildlife Trust Belted Galloway cattle are due to arrive on April 24, initially for the Birch Grazing Area. This area is now approximately 14 acres and now includes a more wooded component.
29. 8001 volunteer hours were achieved during 2017-18. This mainly comprises the contribution of our own directly managed conservation group, with

additional help from the Lower Mole Partnership, Trust for Conservation Volunteers, work experience placements and corporate volunteers.

30. Links have been made with the City of London Freemans School. Rangers have already given an assembly talk on conservation and are due to advise on the creation of a wildlife pond.

### **Support Services**

31. The Administration Assistant for Ashtead and Merlewood Estate Offices, has now successfully completed the induction programme and subsequently been appointed as permanent staff.
32. A busy period for the team with the many challenges the financial end of year procedures and processes bring but once again a sterling performance ensuring a successful close to the year and turnout.

### **Incidents**

#### **Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common**

33. There were 11 reported incidents during the period
34. Four incidents relate to fly tipping around Burnham Beeches.
35. There were five incidents related to dogs: two PSPO incidents requiring follow up action.
36. There were a number of vehicles stranded on or around the Beeches during the recent snowfalls in March 2018 but no damage to site infrastructure occurred as a result of the icy conditions.
37. The City Surveyor team are dealing with two potential issues of encroachment by neighbouring properties to Burnham Beeches.

#### **Ashtead Common**

38. Motorbikes reported on Ashtead Common between Newton Wood and Stew Ponds car park. The matter was reported to Police and further liaison between the Ashtead Team, Epsom Common team and the Police is to be arranged.

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

39. Kenley Common - Road pins were used by person(s) unknown to pin down the electric fencing used to enclose the sheep. Fortunately the sheep did not escape, and the damage repaired was quickly by the Ranger team.

- 40. Riddlesdown Common – A sheep become stuck in the small quarry and was freed by the onsite ranger before it came to harm.
- 41. Spring Park – Flower stall assembled in Addington Road car park. Senior Ranger advised that this was not permitted, and the trader was removed from site.
- 42. West Wickham Common – Small fire of brash, near earthworks, but very limited damage to site.

## **Filming, major events and other activities**

### **Burnham Beeches**

- 43. Despite relatively poor weather Easter events including an Easter trail and woodlands wonders days, were all well attended. Regular 'Meet the Ranger' events continue to be popular with over 100 people actively engaging with the two-hour session in April.

### **The West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons**

- 44. Clean for the Common – Coulsdon Common (further events on Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown Common. Unfortunately all cancelled because of the poor weather conditions.
- 45. Easter Events – Easter egg shell painting at Spring Park, Easter egg rolling competition on Coulsdon Common and a Kenley Common Family Day, including an Easter trail, Ranger stall and various children's activities.
- 46. Calving event at Merlewood Estate Office – we opened our gates to welcome visitors to meet the cows and their new born calves. In addition, a Ranger stall and various children's activities attracted over 150 visitors.
- 47. Talk – 'Biodiversity on London's doorstep' – An introduction to nature conservation across the Commons delivered to Spring Park Social Club, Trefoil Guild.

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