

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons	January 2019
Subject: Superintendent's Update	Public
Report of: Superintendent of 'The Commons'	For Information
<p style="text-align: center;">Summary</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>Recommendation</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 continues to operate with extraction progressing well but infilling rather slower at present. The next cell should be ready for soil stripping next spring/early summer. Gravel quality and quantity is variable across the site and in the direction towards the Beeches the depth of gravel is quite shallow with clay just below. Water levels are generally very low, and pumping of water has not been necessary. Some hydrology monitoring points have shown strange readings, but it is considered by the hydrologist that these are not due to the operation of the quarry. Dust monitoring has shown some elevated levels during the autumn, but these are probably due to organic matter rather than quarry workings.
2. South Bucks District Council (SBDC) have gone out to tender for some work which will update that carried out a few years ago and help to justify for the stance they are taking regarding the Beeches in the Local Plan. Another set of consultants continue to work on the Habitats Regulations assessment in relation to air quality. Officers are providing input into both documents as well as the mitigation strategy for the Beeches.
3. Following approval by this Committee the Stoke Common management plan has been finalised and will shortly be available via the website.
4. The final agreement from Natural England (NE) for the Countryside Stewardship grant is still awaited. Recent communication with our NE adviser indicates that it is

making progress but, although it is due to start on 1st January, final approval may not now be received within the expected deadline.

5. A meeting was held with 'Wood', ecological consultants for Heathrow Airport, to outline the process regarding an application for funding biodiversity net gain around Burnham Beeches. A draft expression of interest has been submitted and initial, favourable comments received. Discussions with neighbouring organisations and potential partners have started and will continue into the New Year. A Project Development Officer is to be appointed in early 2019 to develop the scheme. This post is being funded by the City's Priorities Investment Pot (PIP)
6. A temporary mobile refreshment van is now operating at Burnham Beeches on weekends, bank holidays and at other peak times. The tender process for re-letting the Burnham Beeches café will commence early in the New Year with an expectation that it will begin to operate in April 2019. The opportunity has been taken to undertake the necessary cyclical maintenance works and redecorations including rewiring and new flooring.
7. Heathland restoration at Stoke Common continues with contractors clearing trees from small areas of the Main Common.
8. The Volunteers at both sites have continued with scrub clearance and participated in the Christmas task which included wreath making and a party complete with quiz, bingo and Christmas carols. Both sites have Christmas trees made from birch logs erected by the volunteers.
9. A festive trail has been set up for visitors and Carols at the café' taken place.
10. Livestock continue to graze both sites with two pigs at Burnham Beeches and ponies grazing the north and West Commons at Stoke Common before moving to the local country Park, Black Park in early January. The cows have moved to their winter quarters with a local farmer.
11. A student from Belgium has arrived and started her three-month placement at Burnham Beeches. She will be working with the Conservation Officer and assisting with volunteer tasks. Her main project will be assessing the young pollards cut in recent years which will result in a new 10-year management plan.
12. The Ranger team have carried out annual brush cutting works and are preparing to start cutting the young pollards in January.
13. The Head Ranger of Burnham Beeches continues to work with consultants to develop a project to replace the aging car park charging infrastructure at Burnham

Beeches and to introduce similar at Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown. This project is funded from the PIP and delivery is anticipated during 2019.

PARTNERSHIPS

Kenley Revival update

13. Work is progressing on two fronts to resolve the thaumasite sulphate attack issue affecting the conservation works. A series of test panels have been installed within the new spine wall at the Tribute Fighter Pen to test a variety of mortars, bricks and waterproofing solutions. These will be in place for six months to test their resilience to environmental conditions, following which they will then be independently analysed to assess the most suitable repair option. Alongside this a firm specialising in construction law has been instructed to advise on the contractual liabilities involved to establish which party must bear the cost of rectification. Their conclusions, options and recommendations are anticipated in January 2019
14. A series of events to mark Remembrance season has concluded, with 2,527 people directly engaged over three months. This includes 309 school students who took part in remembrance assemblies and workshops, 213 who attended lectures on WWII related themes and conservation, and 53 people who attended performances based on the memoirs of a Kenley WAAF, Lillias Barr.
15. A 'design a Spitfire' competition has just closed with over 200 entries from school students who created artwork based on drawings of Spitfire outlines. The overall winner will have their design painted by an aviation artist.
16. Design of interpretative signage is nearing its final stages and soon the large wings, small wings and tabletop signs will be ready for production. A planning condition to supply material samples must be discharged, and it is now anticipated that a single example of each sign is produced for this purpose. It is expected that the suite of 23 signs will be installed in the spring.
17. The post of 'Kenley Revival Legacy Officer' has been evaluated and will be advertised in January. This is another (PIP) funded initiative to maintain the project's legacy after HLF funding ends in late 2019.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

18. Having recently appointed a new Livestock Ranger and Conservation Ranger the final vacancy, i.e. Information Ranger is now being recruited. Interviews will be held at the beginning of January 2019. Works to the lodge associated with this post have recently been completed bringing to a resolution long standing damp issues associated with the property.

19. Scrub vegetation around the quarry at Optical Surfaces, Riddlesdown has been cleared and loose rocks in the quarry face were removed by a contractor whilst the operations were carried out, making the site safe for users.
20. High risk tree safety inspections have been carried across all sites. The resulting work specification has been sent to procurement and a contractor appointed. Medium-risk tree inspections are scheduled for mid-January.
21. A contractor has been appointed to carry out a section of roadside tree management along the A22 at Riddlesdown. This carriageway is a strategic route into central London and this work will reduce our risk in terms of tree safety management for the next 10 years.
22. Under the supervision of an archaeologist from the Museum of London, contractors have started to reinstate the ditch and bank system along Ditches Lane on Farthing Downs. In addition to this, the London Borough of Croydon added this byway to their 20mph scheme to help us reduce the speed of vehicles using the site. The benefits of the scheme include improvements to the safety and welfare visitors and livestock, the protection of the Scheduled Ancient Monument from unauthorised vehicle access and the parking of vehicles on the roadside verges.
23. The final coupe of Sweet Chestnut alongside Woodland Way, Spring Park, has been coppiced marking the end of a 16-year rotation
24. The pregnant cattle have now been moved into the barn at Merlewood Estate Office where they will have time to settle in before the first calf is due in January 2019.
25. Rangers and the Kenley Volunteers were joined by the Ashted Common Rangers and their volunteers to carry out hedge laying on the Common. Together they completed a full 'chain' the traditional measuring unit of hedge laying and totalling 22 yards. The hedge was laid in the 'South of England' style, using Hazel stakes and binders to hold the hedge in place until the re-growth stabilises and the hedge can stand alone. The traditional form of hedgerow management is both beneficial for wildlife and can act as a stockproof fence, reducing the need for timber replacement.
26. Rangers spotted a Hedgehog foraging along the grass verge at Spring Park. This is very exciting news as it's the first official record of a Hedgehog at the site. Hedgehog numbers are declining, and numbers have fallen below 1 million in the UK. In the last 10 years the population has declined by 30%. The Ranger team will start monitoring and surveying for Hedgehogs at Spring Park, formally in 2019.

27. A consultant has recently concluded an appraisal of the potential to raise income from the provision of catering services at Farthing Down, Riddlesdown and Ashtead Common. Their report is expected in late January 2019

Ashtead Common

27. Work has started on the veteran oak trees to reduce crowns and halo release according to each trees' individual plan. In total around 75 trees will be treated over a seven-week period.
28. Scrub management work is well under way on the lower slopes and Woodlands Road areas.
29. South East Rivers Trust have produced a design for a reed bed to filter pollutants entering the Rye Brook from a surface water outlet at Two Bridges. The report has not yet been analysed in detail, but an initial look indicates that the scheme would require £200,000 to £250,000 across all partners to achieve.

Incidents

Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

30. There were 15 reported incidents during the period
31. There were four incidents related to dogs: One dog not under effective control and three PSPO incidents requiring follow up action. Two Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) have been issued by Rangers, one each for fouling and walking too many dogs to the open Space. One FPN has been paid and the other is still outstanding.
32. Other incidents included, site misuse (camping/motorbikes/ 1 x fly tipping) and one where a Ranger helped in the search for a missing person thought to be at risk of committing suicide. – the person was ultimately found alive and well away from Burnham Beeches.
33. The City Surveyor team have aided site Rangers in dealing with two potential issues of encroachment by neighbouring properties to Burnham Beeches. In one case the encroachment (a shed) has been removed and the ground made good. The other matter is still ongoing.

Ashtead Common

34. Incidents recorded in this period include a person camping, an aggressive man trying to gain entry to the office and unauthorised metal detecting. These were all reported to the Police.

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35. Rangers were called to an incident on Kenley Common involving a reported dog attack on a deer. Upon arrival members of the public briefed the team on what had happened and the location of the injured animal. Due to the injuries sustained, the Head Ranger took the decision to dispatch the deer. It is understood that the person responsible may be known to us and has previously been cautioned by the Police for a similar offence. The matter is currently being dealt with by the Police and we are assisting with witness statements and previous incident reports.

Filming, major events and other activities

Burnham Beeches

36. There have been five events at the Beeches over the past two months. Despite the closure of the Burnham Beeches Café whilst the re-tendering process is carried out, the Carols event remained very popular with around 150 people taking part in both the carols and the craft activities offered by the Rangers. The festive trail is currently on-going and will run throughout the Christmas period.
37. There were two requests for guided walks, one from a former British Airways stewardesses' group and the other some students from Reading University.

The West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons

38. Coulsdon Common - Chain Gang cleared secondary woodland in Stites Hill adjacent to the old pond.
39. Coulsdon Common – engineers, architects and designers from Network rail all came as part of a corporate volunteering day to assist Rangers with scrub clearance at The Grove.

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