

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons Committee	January 2020
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 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.</p>	

Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

1. Two inspectors have been appointed to examine the South Bucks District Council (SBDC) Local Plan and have asked questions of the Council. A meeting was held between SBDC, Lepus (the consultancy conducting the Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Council), City Corporation (CoL) and Natural England to discuss progress. Changes of staff at SBDC have led to some inconsistency of approach regarding the mitigation strategy for recreation pressure and will require further work by CoL/Natural England to ensure the best outcome for Burnham Beeches. Requirements in relation to air quality are also still unclear. Dates for the Examination in Public have not yet been set.
2. Liaison has continued with Heathrow Airport and the Memorandum of Understanding is close to being finalised. It is hoped that this will soon be presented for approval under delegated authority, as agreed at the September 2019 meeting of this Committee. Discussions have continued with the various potential partners. A report for Members of South Bucks District Council is being prepared for discussion at their January meeting. Discussions have also started with Buckinghamshire County Council to ensure a smooth transition to the new unitary authority in April 2020.
3. Production of the new 10-year Burnham Beeches Management Plan continued. Responses from the public consultation event in October have been analysed and incorporated within the plan. Visitor support for the major work areas consulted on was generally very high. The long-term vision received 98% support. The draft plan and consultation analysis report have been submitted to this Committee for approval at this meeting in January 2020.

4. The minor leak in the dam structure of Middle Pond remains under investigation. The structure will continue to be monitored with minor exploration works undertaken as local risk budgets allow before the end of March 2020.
5. Contractors have been working on Stoke Common carrying out maintenance work along the firebreak at Vine Road, on the West Common and small-scale heathland restoration works on an area of the main common.
6. Volunteers have also been busy at Stoke Common and Burnham Beeches cutting of scrub as part of heathland restoration at Stoke Common and clearing holly and other scrub at Burnham Beeches from around the ancient pollards ahead of restoration cutting works in January. They have also undertaken seasonal tasks like the erection of the traditional birch Christmas trees at Stoke Common and the Beeches. All enjoyed their annual Christmas tasks, wreath making and party.
7. The ecology volunteers have been busy over the period with regular monitoring of dust and invertebrates. They have carried out benchmark measuring of features for the new management plan and are helping with surveys to update the young pollard 10-year work programme.
8. The cattle have been taken off both sites for the winter and the Exmoor ponies will soon be on their way to Stoke Common early in the New Year.
9. A new 10-year conservation grazing contract at Stoke Common has recently gone through a tender exercise. The successful bid is due to commence in April 2020.

PARTNERSHIPS

Kenley Revival update

10. The City Funded Legacy Officer continues to deliver an exciting and varied programme of volunteering, educational and public engagement activity. In October and November, the number of volunteer hours achieved was 50, with 230 school pupils engaged through workshop activities and site visits. A further 230 adults were engaged through walks and talks and at events.
11. The travelling exhibition returned from the Kent Battle of Britain Museum and went on to Croydon Museum for three weeks in November.
12. A pop-up museum displaying the travelling exhibition and a collection of WWII artefacts was held at the Merlewood Estate Office on December 14.
13. The Buildings Research Establishment have produced a short report to clarify the conclusions they reached in their report on the materials trial. The implications of this short report are currently being assessed.

14. The signage contractor has produced samples of both the large and small wing sign designs that will be placed in situ for examination by the planning authority.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

15. Staff vacancies remain a concern with the Ranger team currently carrying three full time equivalent vacancies and one full time equivalent maternity leave cover. An Assistant Ranger has been recruited (commences January 2020) to provide the maternity leave cover. Other posts are to be recruited on fixed term contracts as a means of maintaining adequate levels of service until the Division's structure can be reviewed.
16. A new livestock race (handling system) has been installed at Riddlesdown at the entrance to Optical Services car park on Godstone Road. This will allow the cows and sheep to be more easily moved between Farnet and Norfolk Bank without the need for large numbers of staff, volunteers and tractor and trailer.
17. The Ranger team have nearly completed tree safety inspections of medium and high-risk trees across the Commons.
18. The cows on Farthing Downs have moved from Farthing Downs to the Merlewood Estate Office yard for winter in preparation for calving. Calving is due to start in January.
19. Webpages are being created ready for the new City of London website using the new 'content management system'. Pages will be ready for a trial by January 15th.
20. Volunteers on West Wickham Common are creating a heathland glade by removing scrub over several days. Rangers have followed up by taking out several large stands and 'stump treating'. Restoration of the heath will support the existing 'pockets' on the Common and adjoining green spaces.
21. An interpretation panel for the former windmill on Coulsdon Common is being designed and will be installed in the Windmill Paddock. A new site map to go alongside this has been created and will be reviewed before publication.
22. The Management plan for Farthing Downs is being edited. Amendments to the new maps for Farthing Downs and Kenley Common are being carried out by the contracted designers. The vision for Farthing Downs and Kenley Common is now complete and a meeting planned to prepare a draft vision for Coulsdon Common.
23. Volunteers have cleared an area of scrub under woodland canopy on Coulsdon Common. This was done to increase light levels for ground flora and fauna. The

arising were mulched or placed as habitat piles in the surrounding woodland and the usable timber has been stacked for removal.

24. The electric gate at Farthing Downs car park has been repaired following damage from an incident in July 2019. Opening times have been adjusted to allow early entry for visitors at 6.30am. This should prevent people parking on the verges and in the lay-bys on Ditches Lane.
25. A new stock fence is being installed on Farthing Downs to replace the old one that has degraded. Options for the material type are being considered including metal clip-ex fencing which has the potential last for 30 years.

Ashtead Common

26. Oak Processionary Moth nest removal has ended for this year with approximately 1,000 nests removed at a cost of £43,000. The infestation is likely to be worse next year, but an adaptive approach to managing the risk means that expenditure is unlikely to go up. Like the previous year, the aim this year was to remove 100% of nests from high-risk zones (residential boundaries and areas where people are more likely to be). As the infestation worsens and the moth adapts its behaviour, it is likely that only those nests presenting the highest risk within the high-risk zones (low nests or multiple nests in one tree) will be removed.
27. 'Treework Environmental Practice' has commenced work on updating the individual management prescriptions for the veteran oak pollards. This work is needed to reflect a changed approach to retrenchment pruning that was introduced locally as a result of observing and analysing the response of the trees on Ashtead Common to cutting. Early indications from vitality scoring suggest that the trees have responded well to the treatment they have received to date.
28. The annual breeding bird survey conducted by BTO volunteers has produced encouraging results. Some species that are in decline nationally, such as the whitethroat, appear to be increasing in number. There has been a concerted effort over the past 10 years to manage the lower slopes to achieve a 50:50 scrub-grassland balance, and it is possible that this is starting to yield results.
29. The Apprentice Ranger commenced in her new role on November 18. The apprenticeship will last for 18 months (previously reported 15, but this was extended), during which time she will gain a level two qualification in Environmental Conservation with Sparsholt College.

Incidents

Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

30. Incidents in the period included: dumping of garden waste by neighbours. The neighbours were written to and have helped remove the material.

A number of dogs not under effective control were dealt with – one incident resulted in a verbal altercation between visitors and the police were ultimately involved. A dog walker received written advice on future conduct when at the Beeches.

Ashtead Common

31. None

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

32. Five separate occurrences of fly tipping have taken place across the WW&CCs - the most significant was a large volume of asbestos on Ditches Lane. Rangers worked with the Police and London Borough of Croydon (LBC) officers to clear the site that involved closing the road for most of the day. There has subsequently been a meeting with, LBC, Tandridge and City of London looking at the introduction of high definition cameras on the section of road that crosses Farthing Downs. There is also a joint operation taking place in the New Year with Police and Enforcement Officers stopping suspicious vehicles using the Downs and checking their waste transfer licences. The City will support this by making an area of land available along the roadside for the duration of the operation.

33. There have been two separate incidents of sheep worrying. Rangers are sharing information with the local police and Croydon Enforcement. One individual is known to us and is due to be visited by Croydon Enforcement Team early in the New Year following further intelligence.

Filming, major events and other activities

Burnham Beeches

34. The Beeches hosted several external events: including school visits, Nordic walking & simply walk events and supported activity visit by Cub Scouts from local groups undertaking conservation tasks.

35. Events have included several guided walks and the Christmas festive trail and the very successful annual Carols at the café event.

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