

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	13 <sup>th</sup> January 2020
<b>Subject:</b> Burnham Beeches Management Plan,	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of The Commons	<b>For Decision</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Summary</b></p> <p>The management of Burnham Beeches Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has been guided by an approved management plan since 1989. The last management plan was for a period of 10 years, was approved by this Committee in March 2010 and subsequently given consent by Natural England. The current plan expires on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.</p> <p>A new 10-year 'draft' management plan has been produced for Burnham Beeches commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to guide the City Corporation's work on the SAC.</p> <p>The 'draft' management plan carefully matches the City's commitments under Natural England's ten-year Countryside Stewardship Scheme that provides significant funding to support conservation activities throughout the draft plan.</p> <p>Extensive consultation has been undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders prior to the production of this final draft version.</p> <p><b>Members are asked to:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Approve the final draft plan so that it can be submitted to Natural England to grant consent prior to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. <b>Appendix 1.</b></li> </ol>	

### **Main Report**

#### **Background**

1. The management plan for Burnham Beeches brings together all the necessary knowledge and management activities to ensure that its status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is maintained according to the City's twin legal responsibilities towards recreation and biodiversity.
2. Since 1989, each iteration of the management plan has been developed in a consultative manner. Once in final form, they have been assessed and approved by this Committee before being passed on to Natural England (NE) to grant consent.
3. Your Committee approved the current version of the Burnham Beeches ten-year management plan in 2010. It expires on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Community engagement and discourse with conservation experts was key to the successful development of that plan.

4. A brief list of achievements during the period of the last plan include:
  - i. The introduction of invisible fencing to the site and the development of techniques to make the most of its potential.
  - ii. The area grazed by cattle ponies and pigs was increased by nearly 400% i.e. from 43ha to 165ha and now covers 75% of the site.
  - iii. The successful introduction of Dog Control Orders and latterly, Public Spaces Protection Orders, to greatly reduce antisocial dog behaviours.
  - iv. The careful management and monitoring of the site's cohort of veteran trees and associated species.
  - v. Creation of around 1000 new pollarded trees of various species that are cut on a 10-year cycle as the next generation of 'veterans'.
  - vi. The continuing development of heathland areas and other rare habitats and species.
  - vii. Engagement of local communities and visitors to improve understanding of the site and its special status.
  - viii. Partnership working with the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on their Heritage Lottery Funded Hillforts project.
  - ix. Appropriate inclusion (subject to further consultation, hearing in public and potential revision) of the Burnham Beeches SAC in the local Authority's draft local plan
5. The provision of a management plan approved by Natural England (NE) is the best method of ensuring that the City Corporation meets its legal obligations to enhance biodiversity and guide compliance with NE's Countryside Stewardship Scheme that will fund much of that work.

### Current Position

6. The current management plan expires on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Therefore, it is necessary to draft a replacement plan to cover the period 2020-2030. A final draft management plan has been produced by the Conservation Officer and Head Ranger for member's consideration and approval.
7. **Natural England. Countryside Stewardship Scheme Grant (CSSG).** The site successfully applied for the CSSG in November 2018 with payments commencing January 2019. The grant covers nine of the ten-years of the new draft plan. The grant period runs from January 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> December each year.
8. The development of the CSSG has been helpful in designing the detailed programme of conservation works contained within the draft management plan and thereby ensures compliance and avoidance of financial penalties.
9. **Table 1** indicates the value of the grant in terms of capital projects. Capital grants are only available for the first 2 years of the CSSG period.

<b>Table 1. Capital Project Expenditure</b>	
Year 1. 2019	£29,750
Year 2. 2020	£19,075
<b>Total Capital Grant</b>	<b>£48,825</b>

10. The Capital grant was approved for projects to remove a small plantation of larch trees in the Tower Wood area (this species may act as a vector for Sudden Oak Death) and cyclical cutting of the young pollards.
11. The CSSG also provides annual base payments over the ten-year period to support agreed long-term conservation objectives such as the management of veteran trees and other essential habitat works.

**Table 2. Annual Base payments**

<b>Annual Base Payments. January 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup>.</b>	
Year 1. 2019	£56,963.46
Year 2. 2020	£56,963.46
Year 3. 2021	£56,963.46
Year 4. 2022	£56,963.46
Year 5. 2023	£56,963.46
Year 6. 2024	£56,963.46
Year 7. 2025	£56,963.46
Year 8. 2026	£56,963.46
Year 9. 2027	£56,963.46
Year 10. 2028	£56,963.46
<b>Total Income over ten-year CSG period</b>	<b><u>£569,634.60</u></b>

12. Grant income forms part of the overall annual spending budget for Burnham Beeches. This makes the budget vulnerable should grant income be reduced or cease, and represents an additional risk for consideration under the Fundamental Review
13. **Public Consultation.** Officers consulted extensively during the production of this draft plan. Audiences included, Local Authorities, NE, the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultation Group and conservation specialists. A local community engagement event was held over three days during half term October 2019. Over 900 visitors attended the event and 358 survey forms were completed. The results of the survey were analysed, and a report provided by an independent consultant. **Appendix 2.**
14. **Committee Consultation.** Members visited the nature reserve in September 2019 and were provided with detailed notes for discussion on the major issues arising during the production of the draft plan. Comments made at that time were extremely helpful when producing the final draft of the management plan.
15. **Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).** Due to the status of Burnham Beeches as a SAC the plan will require an assessment to ensure that the actions proposed in the plan do not have an adverse effect on the features for which Burnham Beeches is designated (beech woodland). This will be carried out in consultation with Natural England, prior to consent being given for the actions outlined in the plan.

16. **Equalities Assessment.** Your Superintendent has assessed the need for an Equality Analysis of the draft management plan for Burnham Beeches. The first step under such circumstances is to carry out a 'Test of Relevance' to determine any negative, positive or neutral impacts of the draft plan. In this instance, the test of relevance concluded 'no negative impacts' so further assessment was not required. **Appendix 3.**

## **Options**

- Option 1. Approve the draft management plan so that it can be considered and ratified by Natural England prior to the expiry of the current plan. This is the recommended option.
- Option 2. Require amendments to the plan. Members may wish to suggest further amendments to the draft plan so that the plan may be adjusted and submitted to Natural England after the expiry date of the current plan.

## **Implications**

17. Option 1 will allow a HRA to be carried out and the plan to be forwarded to Natural England for consent within the expiry date of the 2010-2020 current plan.
18. Option 2. If members require amendments to the draft plan and they are of a significant nature, the plan may require further external consultation and thereby delay its submission for the HRA and consent by Natural England.
19. The cost of producing the management plan (£7,000) was met from the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common local risk budgets. Costs included the consultation event, additional mapping/surveys and the design, editing and publication of the final document(s).
20. Having been consulted on the production of this report the Human Resources Department has concluded that there are no likely adverse implications.

## **Proposals**

21. It is proposed that once approved the management plan will be forwarded to Natural England for the HRA and consent commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.
22. Income from grants such as the CSSG have, at least in part, helped to mitigate the impact of budget cuts over the last decade. The local risk budget is now heavily reliant on CSSG income to carry out significant elements of management activity carried out on site. The budget is therefore vulnerable to any reduction in income from this of similar grants thereby representing an additional risk for consideration as part of the Fundamental Review.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

23. The proposals in this report support the Corporate Business Plan as follows:

### **Contribute to a Flourishing Society**

- People enjoy good health and wellbeing
- Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need

### **Shape outstanding environments**

- Our Spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained.
- We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable environment

And the Open Spaces Business Plan as follows:

- **Open Spaces and Historic Sites are thriving and accessible**
- **Spaces enrich people's lives**
- **Business practices are responsible and sustainable**

### **Conclusion**

24. A new management plan has been developed following extensive public consultation. During the drafting period of this plan a grant application under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme was successfully submitted to support much of the conservation work contained within the draft plan.
25. Should Members approve the draft management plan it must then be assessed under the Habitats Regulations and ratified by Natural England.

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1. Draft Management Plan for Burnham Beeches 2020 – 2030.
- Appendix 2. Visitor Consultation report
- Appendix 3. Test of Relevance

### **Background Papers:**

Burnham Beeches Management Plan timetable report – 20<sup>th</sup> November 2018

### **Author**

Andy Barnard  
 Superintendent of The Commons – Open Spaces Department  
 T: 0207 332 6676. E: andy.barnard@cityoflondon.gov.uk