

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Committee name: <b>Epping Forest and Commons Committee</b>	8 March 2021
<b>Subject: Ashtead Common, West Wickham and Spring Park Draft Management Plans and Public Consultation results</b>	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<b>1, 2, 11, 12</b>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of: [insert Chief Officer]</b>	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report author: Superintendent of The Commons</b>	

### **Summary**

New 10-year, draft management plans have been produced for Ashtead Common and West Wickham & Spring Park, to guide the City Corporation's work on those sites. Extensive consultation has been undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders prior to the production of these final draft versions.

Natural England's (NE) Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) has until now, provided the majority of the funding for the conservation works associated with previous management plans. This source of grant funding expires in March 2021. In September 2021, a fresh grant application will be submitted for NE's new 'Countryside Stewardship Scheme' (CSS) that replaces ESS. If the application is successful, this new grant will ensure that The Commons Charities can continue essential conservation works for the duration of the proposed management plans. The cost of other works and services within these draft plans will be met from the local risk budget envelope agreed by Members as part of the City Corporation's annual budget setting process

### **Recommendation(s)**

#### **Members are asked to:**

- i. Approve both final draft management plans (appendices 1 and 2) so that they can be submitted to Natural England for ratification and implementation as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

### **Main Report**

#### **Background**

1. The transfer of Ashtead Common, a wooded common, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR) to the City of London Corporation was completed in 1991. West Wickham Common and Spring Park

were transferred to the City Corporation in in 1882 and 1926 respectively. Both of these are 'Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation'.

2. Since their acquisition, The Commons teams based at Ashtead and Merlewood Estate Offices have actively managed visitor services and conservation management. Community engagement has been central to the successful management of these sites.
3. A summary list of achievements during the period of the last plans includes:

#### **West Wickham Common & Spring Park**

- i. Brown Streak Butterfly – Spring Park now the largest known breeding colony of Kent Butterfly conservation
- ii. Geo-trail created in partnership with the London Geodiversity Partnership
- iii. Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation extended to include Spring Park meadows and pond
- iv. Full, 16-year chestnut coppice rotation completed including use of heavy horses to extract timber
- v. Completion of the hedgerow boundary restoration programme
- vi. Green Flag awards since 2012

#### **Ashtead Common**

- i. Over 700 ancient trees have received tree surgery to extend their lives
- ii. Over 60,000 hours of volunteer time to help protect and care for the common
- iii. Return of the Grasshopper Warbler and significant increases in orchid populations
- iv. Onsite investigations completed at the Roman Villa
- v. Creation of new path linking local community to Ride 3
- vi. Conservation grazing scheme expanded by 75%
- vii. Solar panels installed at the Ashtead Estate Office
- viii. Continuous Green Flag and Green heritage awards

#### **Current Management Plans**

4. The current management plans for Ashtead Common and West Wickham Common & Spring Park ran for a 10-year period commencing 2011, expiring on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. The local Head Rangers and their teams have produced two new draft management plans, i.e. one for Ashtead Common (Appendix 1) and a combined plan for West Wickham Common and Spring Park (Appendix 2).

#### **Consultation.**

5. Officers consulted extensively during the production of these plans. External audiences included local communities, Local Authorities, consultative groups and conservation specialists.
6. The Covid-19 pandemic excluded use of public gatherings to deliver public consultation exercises so web based exercises were undertaken for each draft

management plan using Survey Monkey. The feedback from these surveys was supportive of the contents of the draft plans. **See Appendices 3 and 4.**

7. Members approved the timetable for these draft plans in reports to this Committee in January 2020 and September 2020. The arrival of the Covid -19 pandemic prevented members from visiting the sites to assess the plans in earlier draft form.

### Proposals

8. It is proposed that once approved by the Committee, both management plans will be forwarded to NE for ratification by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.
9. Works outlined in the ratified version of these plans will then guide the final submission for the CSS grant by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021. Should the CSS submission be successful grant payments to support conservation works would commence on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022 see also paragraph 13.

### Options

**Option 1.** Approve the draft management plans. **This is the recommended option.**

**Option 2.** Require amendments to either or both plans. **This option is not recommended**

### Strategic Implications

**Option 1.** Will allow the plans to be forwarded to NE for ratification and onwards for CSS grant approval, thereby enabling commencement of grant payments from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2022, should the applications be successful.

**Option 2.** If members require amendments to the draft plans and they are of a significant nature, the plans may require further external consultation and cause delays to the commencement of the CSS.

### Financial Implications.

10. Productions costs of £7,500 for the draft management plans have been met from local risk budgets. Costs included consultation events, additional mapping/surveys and the publication of the final documents.
11. Conservation work over the 10-year period of the earlier management plans was supported by grant income from the ESS. That grant, and 'area payments' under the Rural Payment Agency's Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), covered the majority of costs associated with the conservation management of trees and other nationally important habitats.

**Table 1.**

	<b>Ashtead Common</b>	<b>WW&amp;SP</b>
<b>Annual Income from HLS &amp; BBS</b>	£30,000	£4,000

12. ESS grant funding for Ashtead Common and West Wickham and Spring Park ceases on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. BPS payments are being reduced in a phased manner as shown in **Table 2** and will cease altogether from 2027.

**Table 2.**

Payment Band	Scheme Year			
	2021	2022	2023	2024
Up to £30,000	5%	20%	35%	50%
£30,000 - £50,000	10%	25%	40%	50%
£50,000 - £150,000	20%	35%	55%	65%
More than £150,000	25%	40%	55%	70%

13. The funding principals for each habitat type under the CSS are slightly different to that of the ESS scheme and it is anticipated that grant income under the new scheme will not be as generous. The Director of Open Spaces is currently negotiating with NE to determine the financial impact of these changes across a number of open spaces. The ambition of the conservation works contained within the draft plans may therefore be reduced according to that outcome.
14. Members should also note that there is a 9-month funding gap between the end of the ESS grant and the beginning of the CSS grant amounting to a loss of income of approximately £23,000 for Ashtead Common and £3,000 for West Wickham Common and Spring Park. This has created an unavoidable shortfall in income for the current financial year of £26,000, which must be met from Local Risk budgets in addition to the 12% budget cuts required for 2021/22.

### Resource Implications

15. Having been consulted on the production of this report the Human Resources Department has concluded that there are no likely adverse implications.

### Equalities Implications

16. Your Superintendent has assessed the need for an Equality Analysis for both draft management plans. 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.

### Climate implications

17. The draft management plans ensure a positive contribution to the City's aims of carbon neutrality for its scope 1 and scope 2 emissions by 2027.

## **Charity Implications**

18. Ashtead Common is a registered charity (number 1051510). West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood is registered charity number 232988. Charity Law obliges Members to ensure that the decisions they take in relation to these Charities must be taken in the best interests of the Charities.

## **Conclusion**

19. Two new management plans have been developed following extensive consultation exercises with conservation experts and the public. Two grant applications under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, based on these draft plans are being developed and subject to member approval of this report, will be submitted to Natural England by September 2021.
20. Funding of the conservation projects listed in the draft plans is under increasing pressure. Adjustments to ecological and recreational services during the period of these plans will be required if available resources decrease further.
21. Should Members approve the draft management plan it must then be ratified by Natural England.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1. (Draft) Management Plan for Ashtead Common 2021– 2031.
- Appendix 2. (Draft) Management Plan for WW & SP 2021 – 2031.
- Appendix 3. Ashtead Common - Survey Monkey public consultation report 2021
- Appendix 4. WW&SP - Survey Monkey public consultation report 2021

## **Background Papers:**

- January 2020 Timetable report
- September 2020 Timetable report
- Equalities Impact Assessment – Test of Relevance

## **Author**

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