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| <b>Committee(s)</b>   | <b>Dated: 10 May 2021</b>  |
| Committee name – Epping Forest & Commons Committee  |  |
| <b>Subject:</b> 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. | <b>Public</b>  |
| <b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>   | <b>[insert relevant number(s) from p3 of <a href="#">Corporate Plan</a>]</b> |
| <b>Contribute to a flourishing society<br/>Shape outstanding environments</b>   | <b>1,2,3,4<br/>10,11,12</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>N/A</b>   |
| <b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>   | <b>Y/N</b>   |
| <b>Report of Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces Department</b>  | <b>For Information</b>   |
| <b>Report author: Andy Barnard, Superintendent of The Commons</b>   |  |

### Summary

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.

### Recommendations

Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

### Main Report

#### Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

1. Visitor numbers continued to be very high through the Easter holidays. Car park capacity has been maintained at the reduced level. Extra car parking was opened on the Bank Holidays to cope with the surge in numbers, but capacity

was reduced again afterwards. Some heavily trampled areas are still cordoned off and more new desire lines have been blocked to prevent access.

2. The team continue to liaise with Buckinghamshire Council regarding the temporary parking suspensions introduced on roads around the Beeches in February. It is hoped that these will become permanent orders later in the year
3. A map of the paths at Burnham Beeches has been produced using a simple red, amber, green system in order to record the damage caused during 2020/21 and provide a record for future comparisons.
4. The cafe at Burnham Beeches has remained open as a 'takeaway kiosk service' and has remained very popular. Outdoor seating has been made available again.
5. Volunteer Group activity at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common started again on 15 April with small groups (maximum 6 people) helping to litter pick and working on path maintenance. Independent individual volunteers have continued on-going monitoring and individuals have also helped the Ranger team with tasks such as fencing.
6. The Eco-volunteer group started back on 20 April and have been carrying out a survey of the wood ant nests across Burnham Beeches.
7. The Assistant Ranger (interpretation) has left Burnham Beeches to join the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust leaving the Ranger team a member short.
8. The mitigation strategy for the impact of recreation pressure caused by housing in the Buckinghamshire Council area has been finalised with the last period of consultation completed. It has now been adopted in full. There have been several appeals for specific development and so far, all of these have been found in favour of the strategy. The system for the transfer of payments collected as developer contributions is making good progress.
9. Discussions have started with a contractor to work on a visitor carrying capacity study and a visitor access management plan which hopefully will be funded using the first tranche of developer contributions.
10. A temporary air quality monitor has been erected on the information point which is part of a trial being carried out by Buckinghamshire Council. Regular monitoring for ammonia as part of the National Network continues. Options have been produced for air quality work using funding from a s106 agreement

administered by Slough Borough Council (SBC) and discussions commenced with various organisations to decide on the final option.

11. The ponies moved from Black Park to a winter field at Teikyo School, having a visit from the farrier and their annual injections at the same time. The oldest pony (now 30 years of age) has some problems with her teeth but following a visit from the dentist is now eating better. The cattle remain off-site in their winter quarters with a local farmer.
12. In the last two months the team have been completing any winter habitat work tidy ups and preparing for the return of livestock. The Ranger team have been repairing and improving fences and gates and the virtual fences tested.
13. Short stretches of 'estate' fencing have been put up at the two most frequently used pedestrian entrances to create a better sense of entrance and to prevent erosion and keep visitors to the main paths.
14. Several of the easy access paths have been repaired and preparations are underway for a major refurbishment of the main board walk which has been badly damaged by the heavy footfall.
15. Two wood ant nests were translocated from Burnham Beeches to a woodland nature reserve in Hertfordshire for conservation reasons.
16. The fieldwork for the complete resurvey of all the young pollards at Burnham Beeches has almost been completed, including the tagging and recording of over 150 pollards created during the wood pasture restoration over the winter period.
17. Annual squirrel trapping has started, focussing on the areas of the Beeches where there are old and young pollards that are most badly impacted by their damage.
18. The annual reptile survey at Stoke Common is in progress after a break last year. Volunteers are carrying out most of the checking and have already discovered reptiles in new areas following successful heathland restoration work of the last few years.
19. The survey of lesser spotted woodpeckers resumed after a break last year and two pairs were found in the same areas as previous years.
20. A local recorder has continued to boost records of slime moulds over the winter. He takes amazing photographs of them and has recently won a local competition.

21. Annual monitoring of the lichen health associated with the workings at the local quarry were carried out, preliminary results indicate no areas of concern.
22. Partnership work with National Trust and Plantlife has continued and funding options explored for the landscape scale project around Burnham Beeches, and survey work on bryophytes in the wider area has started.
23. Plantlife have funded a survey of the rare moss *Zygodon forsteri* at Burnham Beeches. All trees where the moss has previously been recorded have been visited and checked, a random sample of the old pollards examined and all trees checked in designated areas to find out how well it is able to colonise younger trees. There has been some turnover in tree occupancy. Colonies have been found on some younger trees, but this is variable in different parts of the Beeches.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Kenley Revival update**

24. Following approval by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee and the Projects Sub Committee, PAYE Stonework and Restoration Ltd, the project's conservation contractor, is to be instructed to implement a programme of remedial work to repair the thaumasite affected work undertaken in 2017. This programme will cost up to £161,000, funded by a combination of NLHF grant, community funding and City revenue budgets. The work will take approximately 12 weeks and should be completed by mid-Autumn.
25. The project's signage supplier is to attend site to repair damage to two signs and replace the graphics on one.

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

26. With the easing of national lockdown measures, volunteer activities have resumed in groups of six (including one Ranger) to carry out practical tasks whilst maintaining social distancing outdoors. Initial tasks have included clearing of brambles along a fenced boundary in the Grove on Coulsdon Common and tree popping hawthorn scrub on Hilltop, Kenley Common. Staff have been working remotely at home, on site and in the office based on work needs and weekly rotas.
27. Visitor numbers remain high but there has been a marked decrease in the extremely busy days we experienced in December and January. Ditches Lane on Farthing Downs has seen fewer parked cars on the verges and road now that Croydon Council have introduced Restricted Parking and have been enforcing

with penalty notices. Hayes Lane bordering Kenley Common is still regularly filled with cars each day, especially on weekends.

28. Lambing is to take place in late April with two premature lambs being born already. The gimmers were brought in to the Merlewood Estate Office (MEO) barn and were vaccinated ahead of lambing.
29. The Sussex cattle yearlings were turned out in early March, having been wormed and weighed. This group have been grazing several meadows on Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown and will be moved to the Grove towards the end of April.
30. The Sussex cattle have finished calving with a total of 18 calves. The calves have been dehorned and the rest of the herd have had their feet trimmed. The main herd has been turned out onto Woodplace Farm Fields with Wilf, the bull. The colder temperatures and dry start to spring has hampered grass growth so the herd will be periodically moved between Upper and Lower Woodplace Farm Fields to ensure there is enough to forage before moving onto the Downs.
31. New chestnut pale fencing has gone up around some of the veteran oak pollards on West Wickham Common to protect them from soil compaction.
32. The Rangers have been carrying out surfacing works to repair some of the damage from heavy footfall over the last few months. This has included the surfaced track on West Wickham Common and part of the bridleway by the Fox Public House on Coulsdon Common.
33. Contractors working on behalf of Network Rail to maintain and repair the railway tunnel under Riddlesdown have completed their works. Portacabins stored at the Riddlesdown car park have been removed and the area tidied. A new fence line and pedestrian access path with handrails and steps has been completed bordering the tunnel woods. A large area of bare ground has been left and will naturally re-seed to avoid introducing undesirable species.
34. Areas of thick bramble on Farthing Downs have been cleared using the Seppi mower to prevent encroachment and nutrient enrichment.
35. Rangers have been removing the Hawthorn and Bramble scrub using tree poppers on 8-Acre on Farthing Downs. Planned volunteer tasks with the Farthing Downs volunteer group will continue this work to help improve the chalk grassland.
36. The remaining management plans are progressing with the Kenley Common draft plan sent to the consultative committee for comment and dates planned for the three remaining Coulsdon Commons plans.

37. The initial application for Countryside Stewardship funding for Kenley Common, Riddlesdown Common, Farthing Downs and New Hill, Coulsdon Common, Spring Park and West Wickham Common, has been submitted.
38. The Brilliant Butterflies project visited two areas to give advice on improving the diversity of wildflowers. A section of Bunker Bank on the east side of the airfield will be cleared of scrub and examined to see if the quality of soil will support reseedling of key wildflowers for invertebrates, specifically kidney vetch/horseshoe vetch by creating chalk scrapes. Steve also visited the Grove and gave advice on spreading green hay to increase neutral grassland species.
39. The Livestock Ranger demonstrated the use of the 'NoFence' satellite livestock fencing technology to Rangers from Epsom Common, Surrey.
40. The Rangers have completed medium and high-risk tree checks across all sites. Remedial work to clear dangerous trees has been done by the Ranger team and contractors.

### **Ashtead Common**

41. The initial application for Countryside Stewardship funding has been submitted. The application seeks funding for the management of 399 veteran trees, 24.5ha of wood pasture restoration, 55ha of wood pasture management and 8.8ha of grassland management. Because Ashtead is a registered common the agreement, if the application is successful, will be for 10 years and will include the whole common (including a small part not owned by the City Corporation).
42. Volunteer activity recommenced with the easing of lockdown restrictions in April. Currently group size is limited to 10 participants split into two sub-groups working separately. This will change from 17 May when Covid controls move to step three.

### **Support Services Team (SST)**

43. A new Administration Assistant for Merlewood and Ashtead Estate offices has been appointed on a fixed term contract after a successful recruitment campaign. They will start with us on 10 May 2021.

## **Incidents**

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

44. There were 19 incidents in the period. These included 3 instances of small-scale fly tipping, 4 incidents of site misuse (2 incidents of up to 15 quad bikes being driven off road at the Beeches and ,2 of motorbikes and BBQ's at Stoke Common. There were three incidents related to dogs with 1 formal written warning issued for a PSPO breach. One serious instance of dogs not being under effective control, resulted in a deer being attacked by several dogs. Unfortunately, the dog's owners in this incident have not been identified to date. The incident occurred in the area of the Beeches where dogs can be off lead.

There were also two incidents of visitors verbally abusing Rangers. One when the Ranger was speaking to the person about their dogs. The second where a visitor had been asked not to park their car in a location. The visitor got into their car and unnecessarily reversed their car at the Ranger hitting their bicycle. Both matters have been reported to the Police and the City Solicitor asked to advise on any further local action.

### **Ashtead Common**

45. A metal detectorist was caught and spoken to on 14 April.

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

46. There were 4 incidents within the period from 23 February to 19 April. These related to dangerous driving and verbal abuse to a member of the public in the overflow car park at Farthing Downs, fly tipping of tyres on Ditches Lane on Farthing Downs and two incidents of large groups letting off fire lanterns on Farthing Downs including one gathering of 50+ people during the national lockdown.

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

### **Burnham Beeches**

47. Silverback films have been liaising with staff regarding filming of the wood ants in Burnham Beeches for a major new series for the BBC about British wildlife. They have carried out two days of filming showing the ants massing on the nests in the spring and will return in the summer for an extended period.
48. A small Netflix production filmed at the back of the Main Common area for 1/2 day, with 1 and 1/2 day's preparation, in April – earning £8000 in income.

## Annual report of activity in relation to Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO) at Burnham Beeches.

49. The existing 5 PSPOs made in 2017 were extended, following all necessary public consultation and the decision of this Committee in September 2020, for a further 3 years in December 2020. The result of the consultation is summarised below.

Order 1 - 100% support to extend the PSPO for a further three years  
 Order 2 – 94% support to extend the PSPO for a further three years  
 Order 3 – 100% support to extend the PSPO for a further three years  
 Order 4 - 100% support to extend the PSPO for a further three years  
 Order 5 – 100% support to extend the PSPO for a further three years

50. Table 1 below shows annualised PSPO (and previous Dog Control Order) incidents dealt with at Burnham Beeches since 2015/16.

**51. Table 1**

| <b>Incidents detail</b>   | <b>15/16</b> | <b>16/17</b> | <b>17/18</b> | <b>18/19</b> | <b>19/20</b> | <b>20/21</b> |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Order 1 - Fouling   | 11           | 11           | 7            | 7            | 3            | 7            |
| Order 2 - Dogs off lead in the on-lead area                     | 453          | 329          | 285          | 264          | 213          | 524          |
| Order 3 - Dogs not under effective control in the off-lead area | 46           | 30           | 27           | 16           | 19           | 27           |
| Order 4 - Dogs taken into the dog free area                     | 4            | 16           | 15           | 1            | 7            | 1            |
| Order 5 - More than 4 dogs/person                               | 3            | 0            | 0            | 2            | 1            | 1            |
| <b>Total DCO/PSPO incidents</b>                                 | <b>517</b>   | <b>386</b>   | <b>334</b>   | <b>290</b>   | <b>243</b>   | <b>560</b>   |
| Number of incidents resulting in a formal report/investigation  | 8            | 15           | 15           | 16           | 14           | 16           |
| Number of formal written warnings issued                        | 2            | 8            | 9            | 10           | 10           | 7            |
| Number of FPN issued  | 0            | 0            | 0            | 4            | 0            | 1            |
| Number of prosecutions  | 0            | 0*           | 1*           | 0            | 1**          | 0            |

\* Incident occurred in 16/17 – prosecution through magistrate court 2017/18

\*\* Incident occurred in 18/19 prosecution through magistrate court 2019/20

2019/20 visitor numbers estimate - approximately 488000 people visits/annum

2021/22 visitor numbers estimate – approximately 805,000 – 1,000,000

52. The figures for 2020/21 must be compared with previous years in the knowledge that visitor levels were much higher than in previous years at Burnham Beeches due to impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.
53. Until 2020/21 there had been a steady decrease in the total number of PSPO incidents dealt with, year on year. The most obvious increase in 2020/21 is in the number of incidents of dogs being walked off lead in the on-lead area, which



nearly doubled. This was undoubtedly caused by an influx of new visitors not familiar with the National Nature Reserve.

54. Fouling and dogs not under effective control incidents also increased though were still at a relatively low level.
55. The number of incidents where dogs were taken into the dog exclusion zone at the cafe reduced. This was undoubtedly mostly due to the covid safe, one way, queuing system implemented making it more difficult for visitors to just to wander in with a dog without looking at signs and information. Although the cafe was also closed in April – mid June 2020.
56. The number of incidents requiring a more formal report/investigation remained consistent with previous years (16) as did the number of incidents requiring a formal warning letter (7) or Fixed Penalty Notice (1 issued and paid).
57. The approved PSPO and preceding DCO enforcement protocols made it clear that when enforcing the Orders, the City will not take a zero-tolerance approach to DCO/PSPO breaches. This means that in the majority of incidents the person concerned is asked to put the matter right, clean up after their dog, put it on lead, remove it from the dog free area, and if they comply no further action is taken beyond logging of the incident detail. As a result, the vast majority of incidents dealt with require no more than visitors being given information and or guidance by the Ranger team. However, where a breach is by someone who is well aware of the rules, a repeat offender, or where the person is unable or unwilling to put the matter right these will result in more formal investigation and action including final written warning and or FPN/ prosecution.
58. The figures this year, whilst higher overall, reflect that most breaches of the PSPO were not deliberate or repeat offences and were simply dealt with my explanation and information by the Ranger team. This is explains that, whilst the overall number of incidents have increased, formal action levels are consistent with previous years.

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