

Committee(s)	Dated: 17 January 2022
Committee name – Epping Forest & Commons Committee	
Subject: Superintendents update for The Commons.	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	[insert relevant number(s) from p3 of Corporate Plan]
Contribute to a flourishing society Shape outstanding environments	1,2,3,4 10,11,12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	NO
If so, how much?	£ N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	Y/N N/A
Report of Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director Environment	For Information
Report author: Andy Barnard, Superintendent of The Commons	

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. The final public consultation exercise concerning the introduction of permanent parking restrictions on the public highways that pass through and around Burnham Beeches has been completed but the outcome has not yet been reported.

2. The volunteer groups at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common have continued with scrub clearance on the heathland and mire areas. Individual volunteers have continued the on-going monitoring programme and regular livestock checks. A successful winter task was held followed by wreath making in the barn with simple refreshments.
3. The Eco-volunteer Group has completed the decaying wood survey for Burnham Beeches and the calculations now need to be done to estimate the volumes of both standing and lying decaying wood. Simple reports have been completed on their two previous projects, the veteran tree survey on neighbouring land and the distribution of wood ant nests.
4. The ponies have finished grazing the north common area of Stoke Common and are now grazing the West Common, sadly one of the ponies had to be put to sleep, she was 30 years old and one of the original ponies bought from Exmoor as a foal to graze the Beeches in the 1990s – she has done sterling service and had a wonderful life. The cattle from the Beeches have left for their winter quarters.
5. The preparation work for the winter veteran tree pollarding has been carried out, including high clearance by contractors as well as clearance of holly and scrub by staff.
6. Staff have been working right through the holiday period, helping visitors enjoy their visits and have also taking the opportunity to carry out various small repair and maintenance tasks that often get forgotten.
7. Annual tree safety inspections are in progress and some emergency tree safety work was undertaken. More work will be undertaken by staff and contractors in the new year.
8. The archaeological excavation on Sevenways Plain Hillfort was very successful with finds of several pieces of charcoal which should allow carbon dating, plus some coins from World War II. The archaeologist made a video report each day describing what she was doing and what had been discovered. Many visitors dropped by to talk to her as she was working.
9. Burnham Beeches was busy over the Christmas period and, in combination with the wet weather many of the paths are starting to encroach onto the woodland areas as visitors try to walk round the muddy parts.
10. Work has started to identify the carrying capacity for the Beeches in terms of visitor numbers. This work, funded by the s106 mitigation strategy will be the

first of its kind and aims to establish a carrying capacity in terms of impact on various components of the nature reserve including the trees and soils, birds, reptiles and also visitor experience.

11. Christmas events have included carol singing at the café, a festive trail and a display at the information point about how we can minimise the impact of Christmas on the environment.

PARTNERSHIPS

Kenley Revival update

12. The cost of rectifying the thaumasite affected works, completed in November, came to £151,000. This was less than the estimated sum which included a contingency of approximately £14,000.
13. The recent rectification works were inspected by Historic England on December 23 and found to be sound.
14. The 13 tabletop signs and one small wing sign that suffered from vandalism have been re-manufactured and returned to site. This work incurred a small additional cost of £7,000 for materials, but the additional labour involved was provided free of charge.
15. The project's evaluation consultants produced an addendum to the Evaluation Report covering the impact of the signage and the contribution made by the City funded Legacy Officer post. This, together with an addendum written by the Head Ranger explaining the thaumasite issue and a lessons learned summary was recently sent to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

16. The Sussex cattle have moved from Farthing Downs to the barns at the Merlewood Estate Office for winter after completing a season of conservation grazing. We are expecting our first calves to be born on 5 January and the ranger team will be monitoring the herd periodically throughout the day and night.
17. Following the successful lambing last year, a ram, loaned by Capel Manor College, has returned to Kenley Common and put with a dozen ewes. The lambs will help increase the size of the aging Jacob herd and assist with grazing on our grassland sites.

18. Rangers have been carrying out a mixture of practical conservation tasks including removing a dense scrub block on Farthing Downs to restore chalk grassland, hedgelaying and removing invasive cherry laurel on Coulsdon Common, and creating a large 'scallop' on Riddlesdown to maximise biodiversity at the woodland and grassland edge.
19. The Information Ranger held a talk on woodland management across the Coulsdon Commons as part of a symposium on Croydon's urban trees titled 'Who's for more trees' arranged by the Friends of Farthing Downs and Happy Valley. The talk highlighted how we manage trees, risks, and woodland biodiversity. The talk also focused on the importance of biodiverse grasslands in storing carbon; an underrepresented carbon store in recent narratives on solutions to mitigate climate change.
20. In November, rangers attended a site meeting with officers from Historic England to set out a new 5-year working agreement to manage the Scheduled Monument on Farthing Downs. The agreement was updated to include a level of flexibility for installing new countryside furniture, such as temporary stock fencing, where there is a necessity to support habitat or species management.
21. The Information Ranger has been working with Natural England and Croydon Council's Conservation Officer to produce a new map of the South London Downs NNR and create a series of circular walking trails linking sites within the NNR. This project has been financed by a grant for improving Nature Recovery Networks in the UK from Natural England. Maps and information about the significance of the NNR will be installed at several site locations and the walking trails will be published online via the City of London and Croydon Council websites.
22. The public consultations for all of the Coulsdon and West Wickham Commons 10-year management plans are complete. A total of 724 people commented on the plans. Work is now underway to analyse the consultation results and review the plans where necessary.
23. There are initial discussions to grant a license to the Forest Bathing Institute for guided forest bathing walks on the Coulsdon Commons. These low-impact, guided walks are already taking place on similar sized nature reserves managed by The National Trust, RSPB and Forestry Commission

Ashtead Common

24. The City was successful in its application for Countryside Stewardship funding for the period 2022-2032. This will provide approximately £20,000 a year

towards work already prescribed in the management plan. In order to facilitate the agreement, the City will also take responsibility for haymaking on a small section of Ashtead Common not owned by the City Corporation.

25. Crown work on 40 ancient oak pollards commenced early in the new year. Volunteers have already removed vegetation from around many of these trees according to the trees' individual management prescriptions.

Incidents

Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

26. There were 10 incidents during the period 1 November to 31 December. These included five dog related incidents – two involving dogs attacking deer, one involving a dog knocking a visitor over and two lost dogs where the dog was recovered by rangers. All but one of these occurred in the off-lead area. Formal action was taken for two of these incidents where the dog's owner could be identified. The other incidents included a motorbike off road, a vandalised gate at Stoke Common and small-scale fly-tipping.

Ashtead Common

27. Only one incident was reported during this period relating to pollution entering the Rye Brook.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

28. There were four incidents within the period from 29 October to 30 December.
29. One incident was related to a vehicle that had crashed into a boundary fence between Kenley Common and Coulsdon Common.
30. There was one incident of vandalism to a bench on Coulsdon Common that has since been removed.
31. Police responded to an incident involving a distressed member of the public on Farthing Downs.
32. Another incident included a dog that had bitten a member of the public on Coulsdon Common. The local Dog Warden was contacted with details of the incident.

Filming, major events and other activities

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons

57. A small section of New Hill on Farthing Downs was the location for the John Lewis Christmas Advert.

Burnham Beeches

33. Discussion and site visits have taken place with a number of production companies with one very likely to visit in April/May 2022

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