

Committee(s)	Dated:
Committee name: Epping Forest and Commons Committee	9 May 2022
Subject: Draft Management Plans and Public Consultation results – Farthing Downs, Riddlesdown, Kenley Common & Coulsdon Common	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 11, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Juliemma McLoughlin: Executive Director. Environment Dept.	For Decision
Report author: Assistant Director - The Commons – Natural Environment.	

Summary

New 10-year, draft management plans have been produced for the four Coulsdon Commons i.e. Farthing Downs, Riddlesdown, Kenley Common & Coulsdon Common, 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 expired in March 2021. In September 2021, a fresh grant application was submitted and approved by NE’s under the new ‘Countryside Stewardship Scheme’ (CSS).

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 the 4 final, draft management plans (Appendices 1 - 4) and associated consultation reports (Appendices 5 - 8) so that they can be submitted to Natural England for ratification and implementation as of 1st April 2022 (NB. to be backdated due to cancellation of March 2022 meeting of this committee and technical challenges in May)

Main Report

Background

1. The transfer of the four Coulsdon Commons Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserve to the City of London Corporation was completed in 1883.
2. Since their acquisition, The Commons team based at the Merlewood Estate Office has actively managed the provision of visitor and conservation services. Community engagement has been central to the successful management of these sites in more recent years. A summary list of achievements during the period of the last plans includes:

All four Commons

- i. In 2019 the four Coulsdon Commons became part of England's newest National Nature Reserve (NNR) known as the South London Downs NNR. This designation brought together 1030 acres of land managed by the City of London Corporation and the London Borough of Croydon to create a linked downland landscape rich in nature and opportunities to engage with the natural world.
- ii. In 2016 the team were the first to trial the new *NoFence®* technology, this has proven to be ground-breaking in the way we will (and do) manage these sites and ensure our grazing remains specific and targeted to meet our conservation objectives. This technology has subsequently been used at other open spaces such as Burnham Beeches and Epping Forest.

Kenley Common

- i. Kenley Revival Project - a National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) project which set out to preserve and protect this significant reminder of Britain's wartime history as the most complete fighter airfield associated with the Battle of Britain and to reveal the significant contribution made by the people who shaped Kenley's history.
- ii. Chalk grassland restoration - the completion of the restoration of Whyteleafe Bank and Hilltop to chalk grassland from scrub and secondary woodland.
- iii. A doubling of the number of conservation volunteer hours, now exceeding 1,000 hours per year.
- iv. Recorded several new species including red kite, peregrine falcon, cave spider, southern marsh orchid and the purple emperor butterfly.
- v. Introduced private rental of vacant lodge to support the charities local risk budgets.

Coulsdon Common

- i. Chalk grassland restoration - through the clearing of over mature scrub, fencing and grazing.
- ii. Wood pasture restoration - this valuable and now rare habitat has been restored at the Grove.

- iii. Woodland management - new woodland rides created across the common to create wildlife corridors and link diverse habitats for the benefit of biodiversity.
- iv. Community involvement, access and recreation - volunteers now average 1200 hours per year. Our events and education offers have grown significantly and now include self-guided trails, bat walks, storytelling, school visits and ranger led talks at community events.

Riddlesdown

- i. Chalk grassland restoration - the creation of a continuous ribbon of chalk grassland which links the fragile habitats of Riddlesdown with the wider landscapes of partner sites. The clearance of over mature scrub in Famet and the woodland edges of the Bull Pen have created a more traditional, species rich, open and diverse landscape.
- ii. Community involvement, access and recreation - a significant increase in the 'family friendly' events programme including self-guided trails, bat walks, forest school activities and ranger led educational visits. Volunteer numbers have more than doubled, achieving in excess of 1500 hours per year.
- iii. Heritage interpretation improved through the development of innovative signage and ranger led guided walks. Interpretation is updated monthly with historical points of interest linked to local stories.
- iv. Introduction of goats to help with the management of the steep chalk slopes in the quarry which were dominated by coarse vegetation and colonisation by silver birch and goat willow. This has allowed kidney vetch to thrive across the sunny slopes and in turn the myriad invertebrate populations it supports.
- v. Introduced car park charges to support the charities local risk budgets.

Farthing Downs

- i. Chalk grassland restoration - we have now achieved the vision of creating a chalk grassland mosaic across all of the site with a variety of age classes and structure favourable for invertebrates, birds and small mammals.
- ii. Ditch and bank restoration - protection of the site from illegal trespass achieved through the reinstatement of the historical site boundaries.
- iii. Speed limit reduction and no parking zone introduced along the length of Ditches Lane.
- iv. Reduction in the extent of amenity mowing in favour of more diverse grassland that is now managed through haymaking and grazing
- v. Renewed focus on events and community engagement where wildlife themed events have become popular. The volunteers contribute over 820 hours each year to the management of the site.
- vi. Introduced car park charges and business rental of vacant building to support the charities local risk budgets.

Previous Management Plans

- 3. The previous management plans for the four commons each ran for a 10-year period commencing 1st April 2011, expiring on 31st March 2021. The local Head Ranger and his team have produced four new draft management plans to set out the continuation of this work. **Appendices 1- 4.**

4. Each management plan aligns with the draft forms of the five Natural Environment Strategies i.e. Nature Recovery and Climate Resilience, Learning, Charitable Income, Visitor and Destination and Community Engagement.

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 public gatherings to deliver consultation exercises so web based exercises were undertaken for each draft management plan using Survey Monkey. The feedback from these surveys was generally very supportive of the contents of the draft plans and the work of the local team. Other feedback reflected a desire for more facilities such as refreshments, better control of dogs by owners and removal of car park charges, although in every instance the number of comments was low.
7. Members approved the timetable for these draft plans in previous reports to this Committee of January and September 2020. The arrival of the Covid -19 pandemic prevented members from visiting the sites to assess the plans in earlier draft form albeit visits are now scheduled for the remainder of 2022.

Proposals

8. It is proposed that once approved by the Committee, the four management plans will be forwarded to NE for ratification.
9. The work programmes within the draft plans are already closely aligned to the Countryside Stewardship Grant and payments are flowing.

Options.

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

Option 2. Require amendments to either or all plans. **Not recommended**

Strategic Implications.

Option 1. Will allow the four plans to be forwarded to NE for ratification.

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 have consequences with regard to Countryside Stewardship payments.

Financial Implications.

10. Production costs of £10,000 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 previous 10-year period of the earlier management plans was supported by grant income from the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (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 the nationally important habitats. **Table 1.**

Table 1.

Annual Grant Income. 2011 - 2021	The Four Coulsdon Commons
Environmental Stewardship Scheme	£29,000
Basic Payment Scheme	£23,000

Table 2

Annual Grant Income. 2022 - 2027	The Four Coulsdon Commons plus West Wickham & Spring Park
Countryside Stewardship Scheme	£31,450
Basic Payment Scheme	2022: £19,320. 2023: £15,697. 2024: £12,075. 2025: £9,800. 2026: £6,600. 2027: £3,300

12. Countryside Stewardship grant funding for the four Commons and West Wickham Common and Spring Park commenced 1st January 2022. **Tables 1 & 2** demonstrate that income has remained stable since the cessation of ESS and introduction of CSS.
13. DEFRA are reducing BPS payments in a phased manner as shown in **Tables 2 and 3** and will cease altogether from 2027. This reduction will mean an aggregate net loss, including the reduction this year, of £19,699 the local risk budgets that support the conservation management of the sites by 2027. This loss has been balanced by additional income generated via the Charity Income Strategy including car park charges, property rentals and voluntary giving.

Table 3.

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%

Resource Implications

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

Equalities Implications

15. Your Assistant Director has assessed the need for an Equality Analysis for the 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 no further assessment was required.

Climate implications

16. 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

17. The four Coulsdon Commons are all part of the Coulsdon Commons charity number: 232989
18. 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. Four new management plans have been developed following extensive consultation exercises with conservation experts and the public.
20. Should Members approve the four draft management plans they must then be ratified by Natural England.
21. Grant applications under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme were developed in lock step with the development of these draft plans and were successful.
22. 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.

Appendices (available to view through the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CdLkYerEIQk-MbHzE6pE03nhylx2A2y?usp=sharing>)

- Appendix 1. (Draft) Management Plan for Kenley Common 2022 – 2032.
- Appendix 2. (Draft) Management Plan for Farthing Downs 2022 – 2032.
- Appendix 3. (Draft) Management Plan for Coulsdon Common 2022 – 2032.
- Appendix 4. (Draft) Management Plan for Riddlesdown 2022 – 2032.
- Appendix 5. Kenley Common- Survey Monkey public consultation report 2022.
- Appendix 6. Farthing Downs -Survey Monkey public consultation report 2022.
- Appendix 7. Coulsdon Common- Survey Monkey public consultation report 2022.
- Appendix 8. Riddlesdown- Survey Monkey public consultation report 2022.

Background Papers:

January 2020 Timetable report

September 2020 Timetable report
Equalities Impact Assessment – Test of Relevance

Author

Andy Barnard. Assistant Director - The Commons – Environment Department
T: 020 7332 6676. E: andy.barnard@cityoflondon.gov.uk