

Committee(s): Epping Forest and Commons Committee – For information	Dated: 13/07/2023
Subject: The Commons – Assistant Directors Update Apr-May 2023	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2,5,11 & 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director Environment Department	For Information
Report author: Geoff Sinclair, Assistant Director The Commons	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarise activities across The Commons between April 2023 and May 2023. Key data is presented in a dashboard format with further detail given in the main report.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. Appendix 1 contains a graphical representation of financial data to the end of May 2023 (period 02-24) These figures are The Commons Local Risk only and do not include non-local risk elements such as City Surveyors projects.
2. The first table in appendix 1 gives actual expenditure to the end of May 2023 against the whole year budget, subdivided by type and Division of Service (DOS), where BB is Burnham Beeches, SC is Stoke Common, WW is West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons and AC is Ashtead Common. This is further summarised graphically in the chart ‘Budget and Actuals by Type’, across all the DOS combined for this financial year.
3. There are no significant discrepancies between the budget and actual figures to note this early in the financial year. The seemingly overachieved government

grant income figures relate to the late payment of grant income for the 2022 calendar year which was reversed at year end. Payments for 2023 are yet to be received.

The Commons Key Data – Appendix 2

4. **Car Parking Income (Fig 1):** Overall car park income was up by nearly 5% on the same period last year. Farthing Downs and Burnham Beeches increased takings by £656 and £1,941 respectively. However, takings at Riddlesdown were down by 20% and permit sales across the piece were 26% lower than April and May 2022.
5. **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (Fig 3):** Natural England (NE) condition assessment places ten of The Common's 14 SSSI Units in the highest, 'Favourable' category with remaining four unit in the next highest, 'Unfavourable Recovering' category. This data changes infrequently following assessment by NE.
6. **Volunteering (Fig 4):** Volunteers undertook 3,123 hours (446 seven-hour days) of work during the period, the equivalent of £31,230 using the National Lottery Heritage Fund's match funding calculator. Their activity during this period was generally focussed on maintaining and improving infrastructure; clearing drains and repairing paths at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common, repairing dead hedge squeezes at Ashtead and improving step access to Riddlesdown Quarry. At Kenley Common volunteers turned hazel coppice into charcoal and sixth form students from Trinity School helped to protect valuable chalk grassland habitat.
7. **Antisocial Behaviour:** These are at very low rates.
8. **Accidents:** Accident data is still in the process of being compiled

Additional Important Updates

Livestock

9. The Sussex cattle at the Coulsdon Commons were turned out onto Woodplace Farm Fields on the western edge of Farthing Downs having spent the winter months inside the Merlewood barn. The Jacob ewes were bought into the barn for lambing, which ran smoothly with 21 lambs born. Livestock returned to Ashtead Common, Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common during May. At Ashtead 10 Belted Galloway cows supplied by Surrey Wildlife Trust grazed the upper part of the common. At Burnham Beeches cows grazed the main common throughout May contained within the No Fence virtual fencing system. The Exmoor ponies also returned. Grazier-supplied cows returned to graze both sections of Stoke Common.

Coronation events to celebrate volunteering.

10. The King's Coronation Bank Holiday with its Big Help Out theme was marked by two events at The Commons. Volunteer led guided walks at Ashtead Common

provided an opportunity for the volunteers to explain the valuable role that they play in conserving Ashtead's ancient oaks. This was followed by a thank-you reception for the volunteers at the office. Volunteers at Burnham Beeches appeared on BBC local radio to highlight their work, and they too supported events and guided walks during this period.

Events

11. At Burnham Beeches two meet the ranger events alone attracted over 230 individual visitors. The Engagement Rangers supported the Friends of Stoke Common by attending the Stoke Poges Fete. Easter and half term trails were popular with visitors and family and the Beeches has hosted numerous local school visits and other Community events. At Kenley and Coulsdon Common the first-ever Big Wild Walk saw a good turnout with over 100 people joining an activity-packed walk. Throughout the circular trail were several activity stations, all of which gave a flavour of how the rangers look after these two special open spaces and the incredible heritage features and wildlife that can be found there.

Green Flag Awards

12. All The Commons green spaces have been judged for Green Flag and Green Heritage awards. The results are coming through now, but news of success is embargoed until July 18.

Great Fuel Moisture Survey

13. The West Wickham Common Ranger has been assisting The Great Fuel Moisture Survey which aims to establish and test the scientific underpinning and key components required to build an effective, tailored UK fire danger rating system. This is part of a nationwide project funded by the UK's Natural Environment Research Council. Samples of common heather have now been sent to the University of Birmingham for analysis.

Survey and monitoring

14. At Stoke Common the annual whole site reptile survey was completed: 17 volunteers made 101 individual visits (149 hours) to the Common during April and May recording nearly 1000 (990) individual sightings of species and confirming that we have breeding populations of Adder, Grass snake, Common (Viviparous) Lizard and Slow worm. This demonstrates that animals are continuing to expand their range and colonise areas of heathland that the team have restored over the last 15 years of the City's ownership.

15. Volunteers and staff at Burnham Beeches attended a training session on how to assess the lichens on trees in relation to nitrogen levels. Subsequently some of the eco volunteers have been continuing with the monitoring.

Consultation Response on Bucks Local Plan and Bucks Transport Plan

16. Comments were submitted to Buckinghamshire Council on their vision for the local plan and local transport plan. Appendix 3 gives the comments made on the areas impacting on Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common. The comments are in line with comments made and actions arising in previous plans.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Commons Local Risk Financial Summary

Appendix 2 – The Commons Key Data

Appendix 3 – Comments submitted to the Buckinghamshire local plan vision consultation

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