

Committee(s): Epping Forest and Commons Committee – For Information	Dated: 18/07/2024
Subject: The Commons – Assistant Directors Quarterly Update July 2024	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flourishing public spaces • Leading sustainable development
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: Bob Roberts, Interim Executive Director Environment Department	For Information
Report author: Geoff Sinclair, Assistant Director The Commons	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to present key data for Burnham Beeches and the Commons for the period January 2024 -March 2024. Updates on wider activity cover a longer period to ensure it is as current as possible.

Of note, volunteers contributed 4655 hours of work over the reporting period while over the year 16,770 hours of support has been given by volunteers across the Commons. The Commons local risk budget was £3,066.94 overspent at the end of the financial year against a total budget of £1,635,000. We are currently 2 staff down at West Wickham and Coulsdon Common with a fifth recruitment underway to fill the Conservation Officer role where the post holder is planning to retire. A development funding application to prepare plans and proposals for a wetland project at Ashted Common using funding from the Water Restoration Fund has been submitted. The 2023-24 annual reports for the Strategic Access Management & Monitoring Strategy (SAMMs) and section 106 are presented in the appendices.

Recommendation(s)

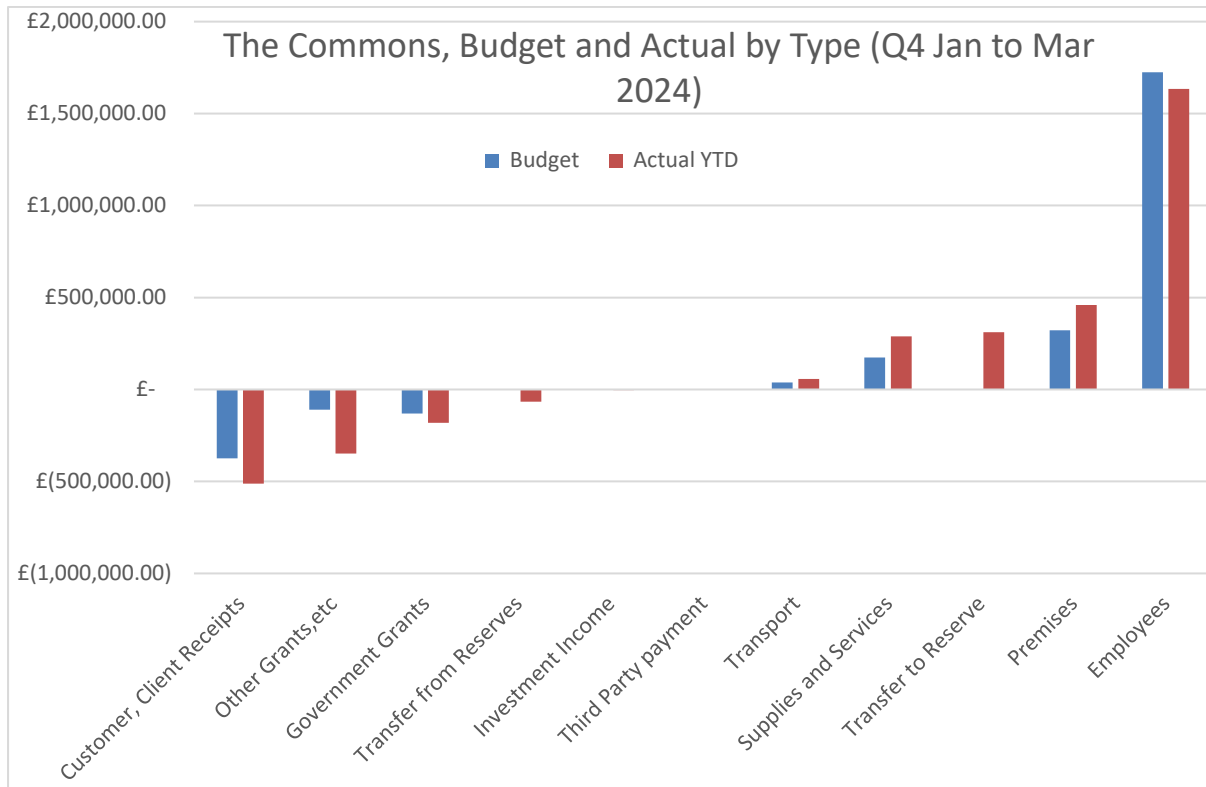
Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

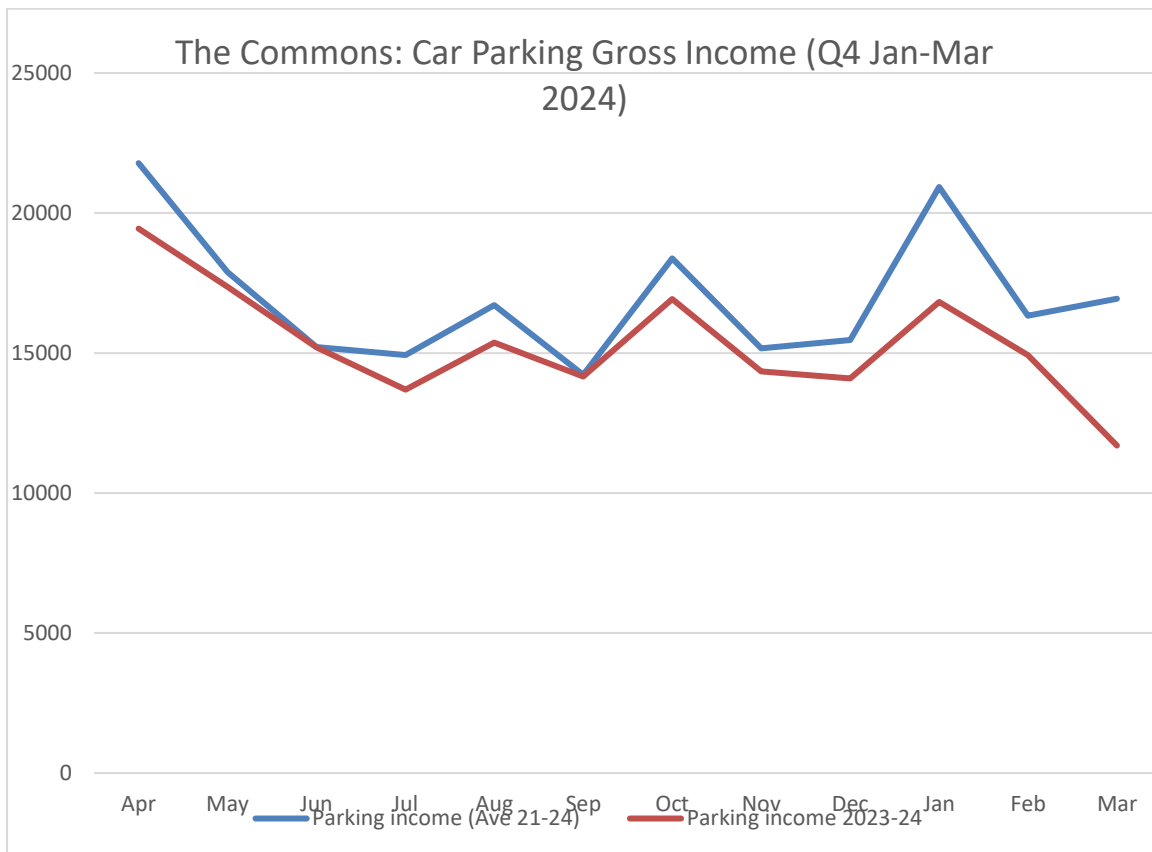
The Commons Key Data

Budget



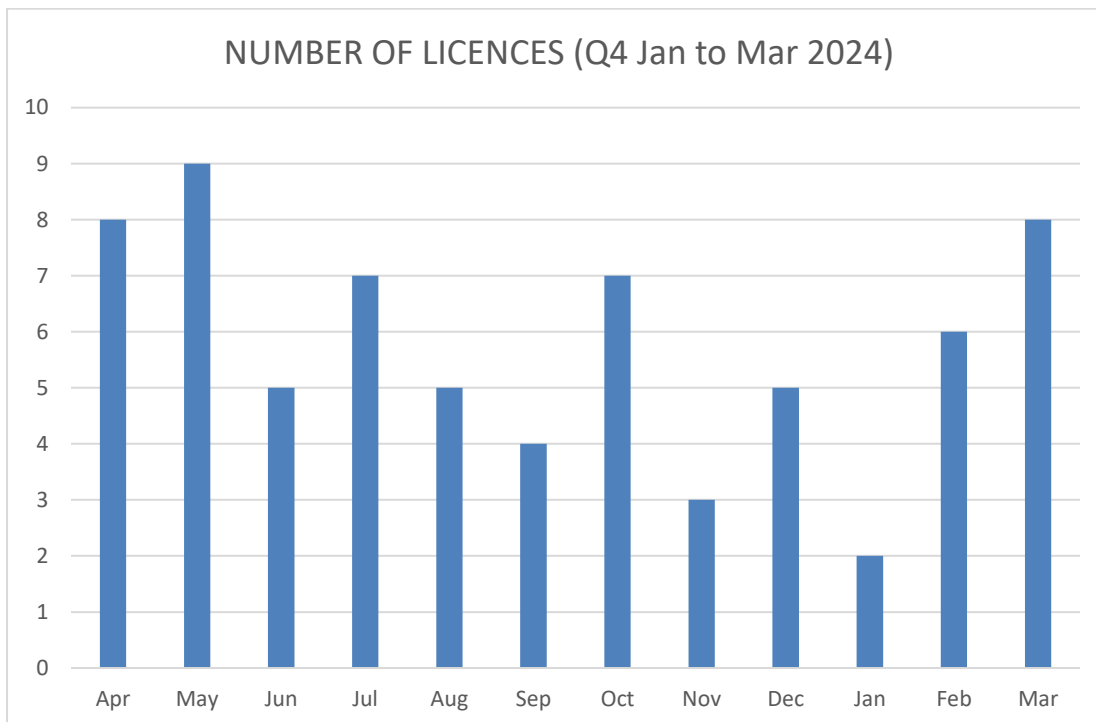
1. Burnham Beeches and the City Commons were £3,066.94 overspent on its local risk budget at the end of the 2023/24 financial year against a total budget of £1,635,000 net expenditure. Across the year income from government grants (eg Countryside Stewardship Scheme) and customer client receipts (eg Filming and café income) were nearly 40% higher than budgeted. We have been fortunate to have at least one major film a year in recent times. The over 300% increase in other grants reflects the income from the Buckinghamshire Council's Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Scheme (SAMMS) much of which is held in a restricted reserve of the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common charity for use in future years.

Car Parking



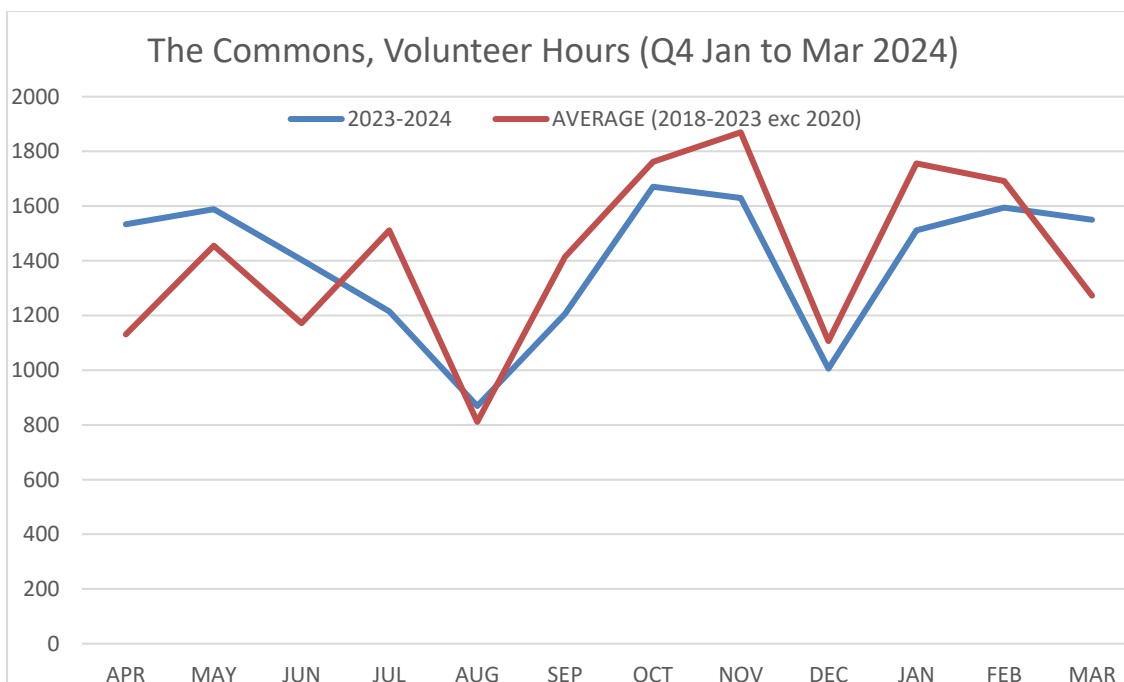
- Overall for the year (Apr-Mar) car parking income is about 94% of the annual average. The drop is largely attributable to the weather with periods of wet and inclement weather reducing visits. The wet weather seems to have had an impact on the first three months of 2024 with parking income around 80% of the average for the same period.

Licences



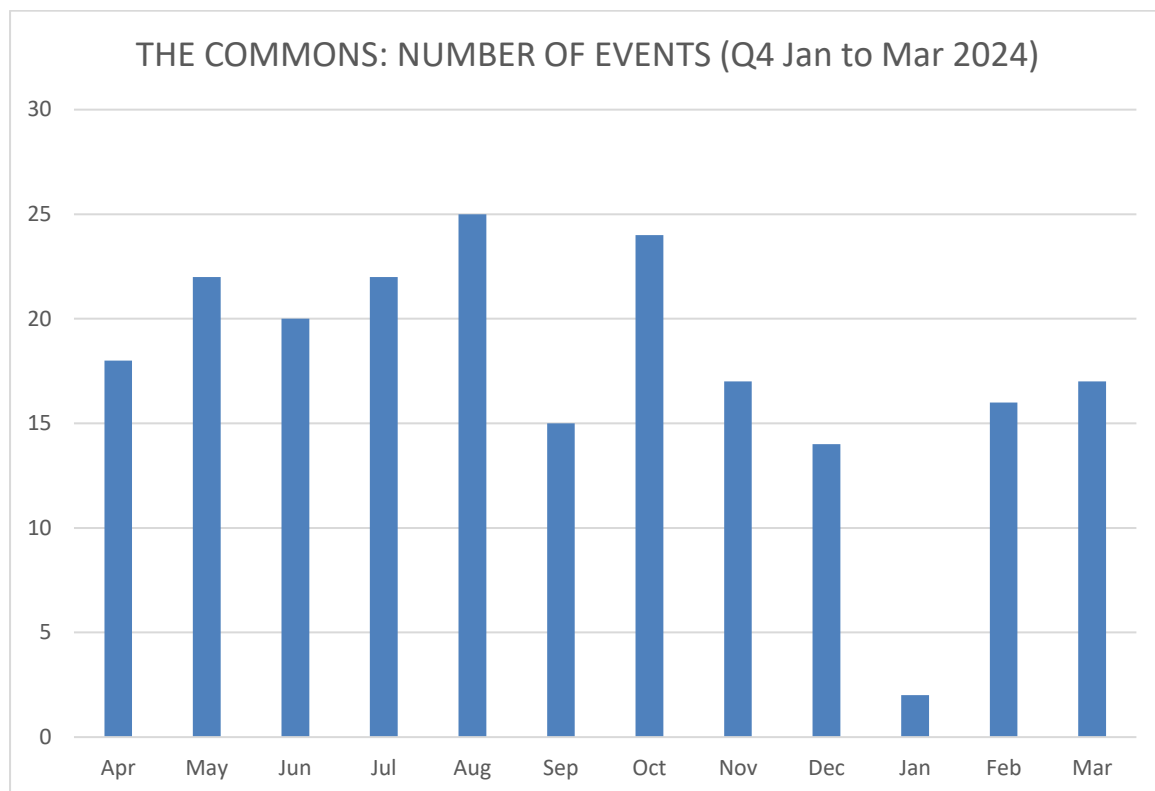
- 15 licences were issued by local staff during quarter 4 (Jan-Mar 2024) against a total of 68 for the year. Typically, these are for events held by third parties such as schools and event providers.
- A large film unit has been working at Burnham Beeches during May and June with 4 days of film shoot in total – the shoot's 'strike' is still in progress.

Volunteering



5. Volunteers undertook 4655 hours (665 seven-hour days) of work during the period, the equivalent of £46,550 using the National Lottery Heritage Fund's match funding calculator. Overall, in the twelve months since April, 16,777 volunteer hours have been given to the Commons, the equivalent of £167,770 of much appreciated 'matched funding' from local people.
6. Volunteers at Ashted Common have been preparing for the arrival of 10 Belted Galloway cows by establishing a temporary enclosure. Work to maintain dead hedges has continued, along with the renovation of sign boards and finger posts. In addition to practical tasks, volunteers have been surveying butterflies and river flies. The latter involves kick sampling to test water quality in the Rye Brook.
7. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons all of the winter work has now been completed with a significant contribution from volunteers to reduce scrub across key habitats such as chalk grassland, woodland and heathland. Volunteers and Rangers have finished laying hedges at Farthing Downs, Coulsdon Common and Spring Park as part of a rotational programme of cutting and laying. Hazel coppicing has also continued with areas cleared on Kenley Common, Coulsdon Common and Spring Park. Additional tasks undertaken by volunteers across WWCC have included: litter picking to stock checking and maintaining heritage features.
8. The Riddlesdown Ranger has been continuing with hosting monthly volunteer tasks on the Common in partnership with the Riddlesdown Collegiate for students with special educational needs and disabilities. Tasks have included scrub clearance, coppicing and helping to maintain footpaths and rights of way.
9. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Volunteers completed habitat works by the end of March And have since turned their attentions to site maintenance, including path repairs and car park works, helping set up for grazing schemes and supporting a wide range of survey work in support of the conservation officer.
10. 17 volunteers from the friends of Stoke common have participated in a whole site reptile survey at the common undertaking 103 survey visits, and contributing 157 hours of survey effort and 1386 species records.

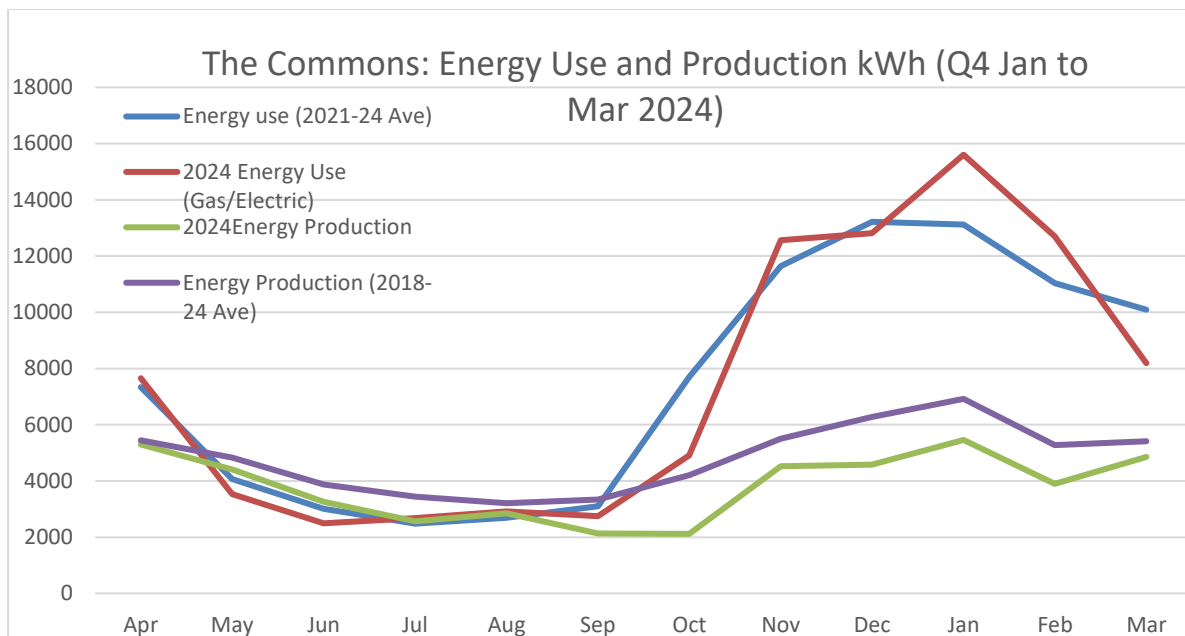
Events and Educational Activities



11. 35 events were held across Burnham Beeches and the City Commons with 933 people attending these events during quarter 4 (Jan-March 2024). The total number of events for the year was 212 with an estimated attendance of 6916.
12. To celebrate National Nature Reserve Week (20 to 31 May) we ran three guided walks between sites in the South London Downs NNR to celebrate its unique landscape, flora and fauna. Highlights included a visit to the Riddlesdown Quarry to see orchids, wild juniper and the goats that graze the chalk cliffs. Several spring wildlife events were held in April and May including wildflower walks at Farthing Downs, Kenley Common and Spring Park as well as a dawn chorus walk on Coulsdon Common.
13. The Big Wild Walk took place on Kenley Common for a second year running. This large event organised by the Rangers is a self-guided trail for families around the Common and airfield with multiple stops where people can learn a bit about the work of the Rangers and volunteers and take part in nature-based activities. Over 110 people attended; mainly young families who we have not previously engaged with.
14. At Ashted educational visits were delivered for students from Sparsholt College and Barnett Wood Infants School. A scout group spent a day with the rangers to gain the Forest Badge. A guided walk introduced people to the benefits of No Fence grazing.

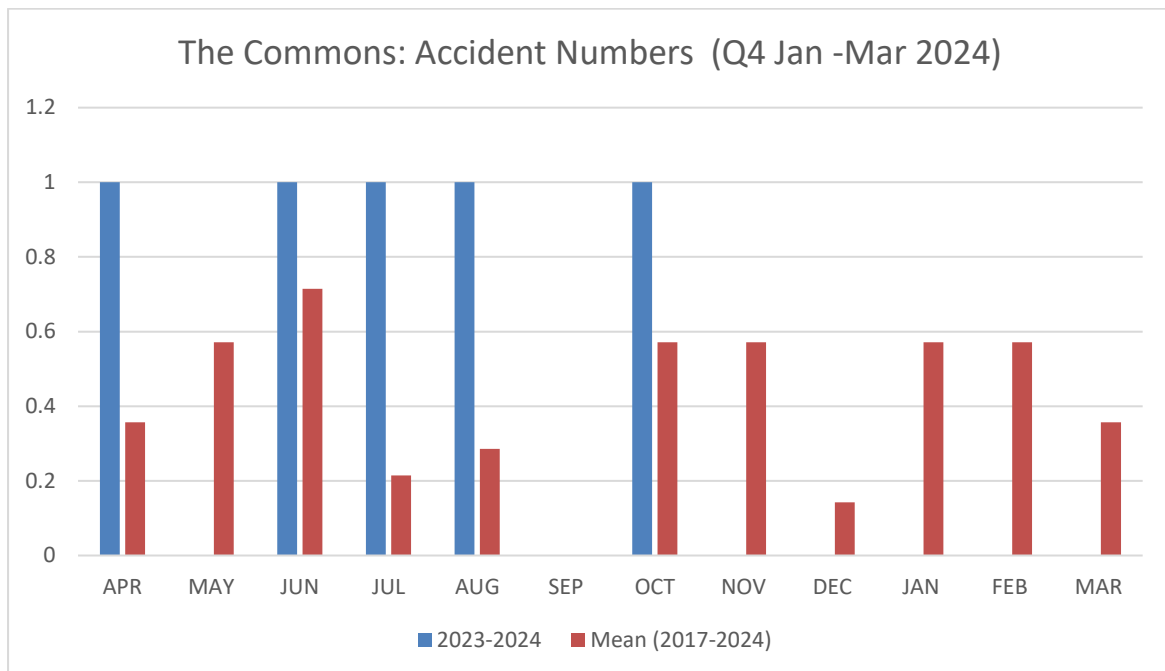
15. At Burnham Beeches events have included Easter & ½ term trails, guided walks and meet the Rangers sessions, just 2 of these attracting and engaging with over 280 people.
16. The Community Engagement rangers have run a series of walks for residents of the Horlicks Quarter, encouraging the residents to explore green spaces close to home as part of mitigation activity.
17. The Beeches team hosted a visit by colleagues from the Environment Departments Business Support team – providing a tour of the open space and an opportunity for colleagues to get to know one another and understand what we all do and how we can support each other.

Energy Use and Production



18. PV energy production was down by 4% in the period January -March on the six-year average. January was a particular good month with 45% more PV energy produced than the average for the month however February and March were especially poor production months. 6.5% more energy was used during the period (Jan to Mar) than on average. Overall, for the year Apr-Mar PV energy production was 80% and energy use 99.2% of the six-year average,

Accidents



19. During the quarter period (Jan to March 2024) we had no reported accidents. Overall, for the year we had 5 reported accidents against a 7-year average of 3.4. 61% of the accidents are linked to either task related incidents (38%) or vehicle related (23%).

Additional Important Updates

Recruitment and Apprentices

20. Across the Commons we have 2 roles currently vacant, representing 6% of the staff resource. Support Services Officer West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons and Conservation Ranger (Ecology) at West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons. In addition, we are looking at recruiting an apprentice for Ashtead Common.
21. The fifth round of recruitment for the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Conservation Officer was in progress at the time of writing and a verbal update will be given.
22. A Support Services Officer has been recruited at Ashtead and is likely to start in September.

Training and Development

23. All team members for the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons attended a refresher course in conflict management and personal safety. Two Rangers attended a 3-day refresher course for chainsaw operation, cross cutting and small felling with rangers from Ashtead Common. Another two Rangers

completed training in the use of wood fed chippers and another in the use of ride-on mowers

24. The Ashtead team all successfully completed their First Aid at Work with Forestry add-on training.
25. At Burnham Beeches 2 staff members have completed the IOSSH managing safely course and the team has attended a refresher course in conflict management and personal safety.

Livestock

26. The main herd of Sussex cattle at WWCC have finished calving in March with 17 new calves. Since mid-April, the herd were moved from the barn to graze Woodplace Farm Field and Tollers on Farthing Downs and New Hill. Two smaller herds of Sussex cattle have been grazing areas of species-rich grassland since January utilising the NoFence satellite fencing on Kenley Common and Farthing Downs. The goats have been removed from the main section of the Riddlesdown Quarry ahead of the first chalk grassland wildflowers emerging and will be temporarily staying in a smaller grazing area on the top of the Quarry until they come back to the Merlewood Estate yard for spring/summer.
27. The cattle at Burnham Beeches have returned to the nature reserve and are grazing the Beeches both in invisible (NoFence) and traditional fenced areas. This is the 13th season that invisible fences have been used at Burnham Beeches. Ponies have also returned from their winter quarter to the Beeches and Cattle are also back at Stoke Common on both the main and west commons.
28. At Ashtead Common the cattle contracted in from and managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust are successfully grazing using NoFence. As this is the first time NoFence has been used at Ashtead Common back-up electric fencing is in place as a precaution.

Project work

29. At Ashtead Common a remote water quality sensing device has been installed at the surface water outlet into the Rye Brook to monitor pollution. This information will supply baseline data for a reedbed project to tackle pollution from a surface water drainage network that discharges into the Rye Brook.
30. The Ashtead team has worked with the South East Rivers Trust to develop a wetland project using funding from the Water Restoration Fund. If successful the design will be developed to a level sufficient to submit a grant application to implement the project if this, or any other, funding stream becomes available again.
31. The Burnham Beeches Strategic Access Management & Monitoring Strategy (SAMMs) and section 106 funded Community Engagement Rangers (CERs)

completed their first full year in post during the period. The SAMMs provides funding for a CER and projects for 80 years via developer contribution relating to developments within 5.6 Km of the Beeches within Buckinghamshire. The 106 CER is funded by payments from 1 development in Slough – the Horlicks quarter - for 5 years. Annual reports of activity by the CERs are attached as appendices 2 and 3

32. The Beeches team have been Supporting Buckinghamshire and Slough councils with running Local Nature Recovery Strategy meetings whilst highlighting the importance of the Beeches and Stoke Common
33. Buckinghamshire highways have implemented the first part of long-awaited parking restrictions around Burnham Beeches with adjacent roads in Farnham Common having parking restrictions introduced.

Survey and monitoring.

34. As part of the SAMMs project a new monitoring strategy to guide the CERs and Beeches staff on what monitoring to undertake to monitor the impact of recreation on the SAC was completed. The CERs have started implementing actions to establish recommended monitoring systems to measure future changes. Their focus currently and for the next year includes areas like path widths and wear/ particular species monitoring and habitat fragmentation.

Consultative Committees

35. Nothing to report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Commons Local Risk Financial Summary
Appendix 2 – Buckinghamshire 2023-24 SAMMS report
Appendix 3 – Slough 2023-24 SAMMS report

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