

Committee(s): Epping Forest & Commons Committee	Dated: 19/09/2024
Subject: The Commons – Assistant Directors Quarterly Update April to June 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?	N
If so, how much?	NA
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	NA
Report of: Katie Stewart, Executive Director of Environment	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 April 2024 -June 2024. The report is in a revised format and is still being developed to align reporting more closely to Business Plan outcomes. Finance and Risk reporting is being undertaken through separate reports.

Of note, through 120 activity sessions 848 volunteers contributed 3977 hours of support during the reporting period. Management plan implementation is progressing as planned with some seasonal impact from the warm wet weather. A conservation milestone has been reached at Ashtead Common with the introduction of ‘nofence’ grazing by our grazier. Car park income is reduced slightly, largely due to the wet weather; however, we have received a large filming fee during the period. A proposed format for presenting the results of annual management plan reviews is being presented.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked, acting for and on behalf of the City of London Corporation as trustee in respect of the charities listed in paragraph 3 (as relevant) to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Current Position

1. This quarterly report format and content has been amended to align the reporting with the objectives of The Commons charities, Business Plan (currently being updated for the period 2025-2030), and with the Natural Environment Strategies. The revised reporting process is still being developed and further refinements will be forthcoming.
2. The revised report structure provides a breakdown of activity in Appendix 1 with summary details and key points highlighted in the following report.
3. The report relates to the following registered charities: Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common (232987), Ashtead Common (1051510), West Wickham Common and Spring Park (232988) and Coulsdon Commons (232989).

Progress against Charity objects, Business Plan objectives and Natural Environment Strategies for the period April – June 2024

Environment/Conservation/Heritage (NEB Nature Conservation and Resilience Strategy)

4. Practical habitat management activity is progressing in accordance with the management plan. The wet and warm year has meant that we have had a heavier than usual grass growth. Biological monitoring over the quarter has included the annual reptile survey at Burnham Beaches and Stoke Common and Butterly transect survey at the Commons.
5. Conservation activity highlights of the period are:
 - a. No Fence grazing system has been used at Ashtead Common for the first time which will give scope for much more extensive, flexible and efficient grazing of the Common in the future.
 - b. Community Engagement Rangers (CERs) at BBSC have led survey work on nightjar and woodcock in addition to footpath surveys, linked to measuring/reducing the impact of increased visitor numbers.
 - c. Noxious and invasive species management has included staff and volunteer removal of ragwort and goldenrod and bracken control. Surveys have been completed for ash dieback and oak processionary moth.
 - d. In line with the requirements of the Climate Action Strategy design work has been undertaken for the installation of 'leaky dams' at Ashtead Common and grey squirrel control has been undertaken to reduce their impact on trees at Burnham Beeches.
 - e. Natural England's response to the first consultation on the proposed extensions to the Surrey Hills National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) was published in July. A report will be prepared for the November EFCC Committee on this.
6. A review of the implementation of the actions in the 2023-24 Management Plan for Ashtead Common has been developed based on the dashboard

concept and is given in Appendix 2. It is proposed that this format be used to report annually on the implementation of the management plans across Burnham Beeches and the Commons and would complement the budget, risk and similar reports. The dashboard report collates details collected as part of the end of year operational review by each of the management teams of the previous year's activity.

7. A question at a previous EF&CC meeting queried why the number of veteran and pollarded trees was differently stated on databases such as by the Ancient Tree Forum and the City of London Corporation's (COLC) own figures. The difference is due to that third party databases are based on historic information while the COLC data is based on more current survey data.

Education / Training (NEB Culture, Heritage and Learning Strategy)

8. Over the quarter 31 local community groups and institutions were worked with. As well as practical works undertaken with different groups staff have supported local school and youth groups to deliver their respective activities on site through leading walks and activities.
9. CERs at BB have led regular walks in Slough for residents of the Slough/Horlicks Quarter in addition to running litter picks and tree ID walks in Slough parks, attending two wellbeing events in Burnham and Farnham Common and Stoke Poges Horticultural show.
10. Across the estate the following visits were hosted to share experience:
 - a. National Natural England staff. To discuss Veteran tree and woodpasture at BB.
 - b. Local Natural England staff to discuss Site of Special Scientific Interest management at BB and WWCC.
 - c. National Trust (Ashridge Estate) to discuss SAMM implementation.
 - d. BB hosted a visit from Head Forester Peter Fixler from Morris Arboretum, Pennsylvania University to discuss veteran tree management and resilience/shared learning.

Recreation (NEB Access and Recreation Strategy)

11. Entrance signage project: The replacement of 40 large entrance signs across the City Commons estate has received £160,000 funding spread over two years 2024-25 and 2025-26. Work has started on the project during this quarter, and it is progressing as planned.
12. The production of a Sustainable Access Strategy is a requirement of the Bucks Sustainable Access Monitoring and Management Project. Footprint Ecology was appointed during this quarter to prepare this strategy, and a first draft is scheduled for September 2024.

Arts / Culture / Heritage / Science (NEB Culture, Learning and Heritage Strategy)

13. Learning and heritage across Burnham Beeches and the City Commons is focussed on practical engagement of the community in the care of the open spaces to promote a sense of ownership of the spaces and improved personal wellbeing of the participants and community.
14. Over the quarter 120 activity sessions were held in which 848 volunteers contributed 3877 hours of support, slightly above average for the period. In addition to practical conservation tasks activity included community tidy up/ litter picks and support with awareness raising and educational activities such as heritage events in partnership with the Kenley Revival Volunteers.

Income Generation

15. Car parking income across all sites was down £1721 on the four-year average. This is likely due to the generally wet weather over the period. A large feature film brought in a location fee of £101,150 over the period.

People Management

16. Following a successful fifth recruitment exercise a replacement for the BB Conservation Officer has been found and the preferred candidate has accepted the post. They started work on the 5th September 2024 and we are fortunate that they will have a three-month handover period with the current incumbent.
17. Other posts filled during the period are the Support Services Officer (SSO) for AC, Assistant Ranger Conservation & Assistant Ranger People & Access for BBSC. We currently have one vacancy for a SSO at WWCC and one of the Conservation Rangers at WWCC has taken up the vacant role of Ecology Ranger as a secondment for one year meaning that we will look to backfill their now vacant role.
18. We have had four accidents during this quarter which have been reported and investigated in line with COL policy. A volunteer was injured by a sheep. A staff member and two volunteers were impacted by OPM hairs as part of a task in June. One member of staff suffered a bad back following a task and another had a bump to the head. On average we get ten incidents per year and four in a quarter is high.

Conclusion

19. A revised Assistant Director report has been presented that is under development and will focus on reporting on the Business Plan and Natural Environment Department Management Strategies outcomes.
20. Management Plan implementation is progressing as planned. Over the period we had four reported accidents which is higher than normal. Community support through volunteering remains high and above average for the period.

We have successfully recruited to four posts during the period with currently two vacancies looking to be filled.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Progress against key objectives / actions.

Appendix 2 - Ashtead Common Annual Review 2023-24.

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