

Committee(s): Epping Forest and Commons Committee – For information	Dated: 17/07/2025
Subject: The Commons – Assistant Directors Quarterly Update April - June 2025	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 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 2025 – June 2025. Finance and risk reporting is being undertaken through separate reports. At the time of writing data for June was not available and this report largely covers the first two months of Q1 2025/26.

Of note, through 94 activity sessions 579 volunteers contributed 2,747 hours of support. Livestock have now been moved onto site from their winter quarters and an extensive programme of biological monitoring is underway across all sites, including reptiles, birds, butterflies and moths. Specialist visits have been hosted at Ashted Common with staff from Natural England visiting to see ancient tree management at the site while the Community Rangers at Burnham Beeches have been supporting our Local Authority partners at Buckinghamshire and Slough Councils with community events. Green Flag judges have visited all our sites over this quarter. We have had one near miss reported which colleagues from the City Surveyor Department are responding to.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Current Position

1. This quarterly report documents the outcomes of work to deliver the objectives of the Natural Environment Strategies and Business Plan. A breakdown of activity by objective is given in Appendix 1 with summary details and key points highlighted in the following report.

Progress against Natural Environment Strategies and Business Plan objectives is summarised for the period April to June 2025.

Nature Conservation and Resilience

2. Practical habitat management activity included:
 - a. At Ashted Common:
 - i. Preparing and installing new byelaw (image) boards.
 - ii. Setting-up grazing area and introducing 10 cattle 'rented' from Surrey Wildlife Trust.
 - iii. Access work including dead hedge construction to sensitively deter the use of desire lines, and path mowing.
 - iv. Leaky dam construction as part of the CAS supported project.
 - v. Staff from Natural England visited on 10th June 2025 to view best practice in ancient tree management.
 - b. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:
 - i. Livestock overwintering in the barn at the Caterham Office have been returned to the Commons and a new bull purchased.
 - ii. Contract awarded for replacement of corporate image boards.
 - iii. All Green Flag / Green Heritage judging visits completed.
 - iv. Works progressing on the reinstatement of the livestock office following the fire in December 2025.
 - c. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common:
 - i. Cows are grazing large areas of Burnham Beeches using the No Fence system.
 - ii. The annual grey squirrel control programme started in March and will be completed in July.
 - iii. The procurement process has been completed for the pond restoration works at Burnham Beeches - these works will be carried out later in 2025.
3. Conservation activity highlights of the period are:
 - a. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common:
 - i. The annual whole site reptile survey was undertaken by volunteers at Stoke Common. 17 volunteers made over 100 visits to the Common during April, May and early June. Reptile

surveys were also completed at Burnham Beeches with the help of volunteers.

- ii. The Community Engagement Rangers have been carrying out a range of monitoring on the impact of visitors with the help of volunteers. These have included evening surveys for particular species, such as woodcock and path condition surveys.
 - iii. Despite the very dry spring a visit to Burnham Beeches in May by the Buckinghamshire Fungus Group discovered 2 new species for the Beeches.
- b. Work is progressing on the hosting of the Biodiversity of Pollards and Veteran Trees conference on the 25th and 26th June based at Burnham Beeches. The first day of the conference will be at Taplow Court centre, courtesy of SGI (UK), and will be followed by an evening walk of the gardens and informal conference supper. Day two will be at Burnham Beeches and will have a focus on the work of the CoL on ancient tree management. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.
- c. At Ashted Common:
- i. Nightingale and cuckoo have returned to Ashted Common. Whitethroat, blackcap and garden warbler numbers appear to be good.
 - ii. Some of the ancient oak pollards on Ashted Common appear to be stressed by the prolonged dry period in spring. An assessment of winter work will be required shortly to determine if it is appropriate to undertake veteran tree works this year.
- d. At West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons:
- i. Moth and butterfly recording has progressed as planned across all sites.
 - ii. Reptile surveys established on all sites and amphibian surveys carried out at the three ponds on Coulsdon Common.
 - iii. Bird surveys completed on all sites including skylark population monitoring on Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown.
 - iv. Dung beetle surveys started on grazed sites.
 - v. National Vegetation Classification (NVC) surveys started on Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown Common.

Community Engagement

- 4. On June 12 the Superintendent for the Commons gave evidence to the London Assembly Environment Committee that was exploring London's draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), including in the context of the current consultation on the principles for the next London Plan.
- 5. Across the estate the following visits were hosted to share experience:

- a. At Ashted Common:
 - i. Young people from Oxygen – a charity grant supported by the City – visited for a guided walk in May.
 - ii. Your Committee visited on May 24 to view a potential wetland creation project, the work of volunteers and cultural heritage features.
- b. At Burnham Beeches:
 - i. Volunteers have been undertaking infrastructure works, fence repairs, path repairs, surveys and bracken control.
 - ii. Local Scout and Guide affiliated groups have undertaken habit works at BB.
- c. The Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common eco volunteers have been:
 - i. Surveying microhabitats on trees and creating a database of 'Wildlife Trees'.
 - ii. Preparing for presentation on tree microhabitat surveys at the Burnham Beeches Ancient Tree Conference (TreMS).
 - iii. Undertaking the annual programme of vegetation plot mapping and maintenance.
- d. 4 x Meet the Ranger events were held and attracted 418 attendees. Other walks and events have included 3 x Simply Walk, 3 x Waggy Walks and the Easter and half term trails were enjoyed by 340 people.
- e. The Community Engagement Rangers have attended off-site community events in Burnham and Slough in support of partners. The whole planning team at Slough Borough Council were hosted on a fact-finding visit at Burnham Beeches.
- f. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:
 - i. London Search & Rescue used Farthing Downs for a staff training event.
 - ii. Local Beaver groups visited Coulsdon Common, Kenley Common and Riddlesdown.
 - iii. Geology students from UCL carried out an accompanied site visit to Riddlesdown Quarry.
 - iv. Paw Wash Station installed adjacent to the public toilets at Farthing Downs car park.
 - v. Kenley Revival Project led a guided walk for members of the public at Kenley Common.
 - vi. Volunteers on Kenley Common cleared scrub encroachment using 'tree poppers'- this will help increase the spread of orchids and other important wildflowers on this historic site.

- vii. Volunteers at West Wickham Common installed a new set of steps to improve access to the site from Gates Green Road.

Access and Recreation

- 6. Entrance signage project:
 - a. All but one of the six new byelaw boards have been installed at Ashtead Common. Most of the design work, preparation and installation of these boards has been undertaken by volunteers. One has spent many hours painting the new boards and legs prior to installation.

Learning and Heritage

- 7. Over the first two months of the quarter (April/May) through 94 activity sessions 579 volunteers contributed 2,747 hours of support, which is 7% above average for the two month. In addition to practical conservation tasks activity included:
 - a. At Ashtead Common:
 - i. A student from Sparsholt College was supported for two weeks of work experience.
 - ii. Pupils from two local primary schools visited to learn about ecology.
 - iii. Another phase of the international study of veteranised trees commenced in May, with invertebrate traps installed in some of the veteranised oaks.
 - iv. Volunteers have been undertaking breeding bird and butterfly surveys.
 - b. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:
 - i. Volunteers have supported biodiversity monitoring of reptiles, skylarks and butterflies over the period.
 - ii. 55 hours of support went in to preparing for the Green Flag assessments.
 - c. At Burnham Beeches:
 - i. Bracken bashing has been a focus for volunteer work during the period at Stoke Common and Burnham Beeches.
 - ii. Path repairs and clearing mini grids and drainage grips.

Income Generation

- 8. Car parking figures for this period were not available in time for this reporting period. A verbal update will be given at the meeting.

9. Licenced horse-riding events on Ashted Common raised £106, while two filming activities on Ashted Common brought in £282.25. Both are new activities at Ashted Common with the horse-riding looking to be a regular event through the year
10. A major online streaming series production was hosted at Burnham Beeches during the period – providing income of £107,000. This is above the annual income budgeted for filming income and we have some further interest for filming this year as well.
11. A new chargeable 'Paw Wash' facility has been installed at the Farthing Downs car park to help generate additional income from the car park. A full 'wash and blow dry' will cost £5 with the option to extend the time at £1 a minute. The opportunity is also there to add a £1 donation to the Coulsdon Commons Charity.

People Management

Burnham Beeches

12. Training in fire management was held over the period with 16 staff attending Lantra accredited Vegetation Fire Operator and Management planning Modules and the use of new Fire Fogger units.
13. A discussion/training day was held at Burnham Beeches to investigate possible methods to understand the impact of recreation pressure on soils. Colleagues from the Carbon Removal Project also attended.
14. The BB Apprentice completed their End Point Assessment and has successfully applied for the role of seasonal Assistant Ranger at BBSC. They start their new role on the 1st July.
15. Following the retirement of a Ranger earlier in the year an Assistant Ranger at Burnham Beeches successfully applied for the role as a new grade C Ranger and will also start on the 1st July.
16. 2025/26 Apprentice post for Burnham Beeches has been advertised, interviews will take place on the 3rd July.

West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons

17. Two Apprentice posts for 2025/26 have been advertised with interviews taking place on June 19th.
18. Of the current two apprentices at WWCC one apprentice has completed their End Point Assessment and will be leaving us in September to study Countryside Management at the University of Kent. The second apprentice continues with their work based learning programme, developing specific skills in animal husbandry.

19. Following leadership training by Focal Point the WWCC team have taken part in a series of local developmental exercises and are in the process of finalising a team charter.

Risk Management

20. There was a small wildfire at Stoke Common at the start of May, this was deliberately set with multiple points of ignition. The Fire Service attended very quickly and supported by the local team the fire was quickly extinguished damage being very patchy over an area of approximately 250m².
21. At the end of May police attended a serious incident involving two people known to each other. One person was stabbed by the other and staff supported police with access as required until the suspect was arrested. Staff did not witness the incident or deal with any casualty.
22. All high and medium risk tree safety work has been completed at the WWCCs and all six-monthly tree inspections have been completed at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.
23. Site infrastructure checks have been completed at all sites. Ditches Road cattle grid had further work undertaken to reduce noise and to reinforce the fixings. The company used is very experienced in highway works and the repairs hopefully will be more durable than before. Site infrastructure has been checked and fencing repairs undertaken to allow overwintering livestock to return to both Stoke Common and Burnham Beeches.
24. The annual programme of clearing highway site lines has been completed across all sites.
25. Over the two-month period we had a near miss incident with a tile falling from a roof while under repair. The City Surveyors Department are leading on the investigation of the incident.

Conclusion

26. This report covers the first two months of Q1 only. Management Plan implementation has progressed as planned. Over the period we had one reported near miss incident. Community support through volunteering remains high. We currently have one vacancy looking to be filled and recruitment for three apprentices is underway.

Appendix 1 – Progress against key objectives / actions (categorised by Natural Environment Strategy).

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