

## City of London Corporation Committee Report

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Committee(s):</b><br>Epping Forest and Commons Committee   | <b>Dated:</b><br>27/11/2025  |
| <b>Subject:</b> The Commons – Quarterly Update July-Oct 2025  | Public   |
| <b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flourishing public spaces</li> <li>• Leading sustainable development</li> </ul> |
| <b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>                                  | No   |
| <b>If so, how much?</b>   | n/a  |
| <b>What is the source of funding?</b>   | n/a  |
| <b>Has this funding source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>                             | n/a  |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Katie Stewart, Executive Director Environment  | For Information  |
| <b>Report author:</b><br>Andrew Impey, Deputy Director, Natural Environment                               |  |

### Summary

The purpose of this report is to present key data from across the Commons for the period July 2025 – Oct 2025. Finance and risk reporting is being undertaken through separate reports.

Green Flag judges visited all our sites over the previous quarter, and in July we were delighted to announce that the Commons received eight Green Flags and seven Green Heritage awards. Volunteers obviously play a fundamental role in being able to achieve these fantastic awards and it’s therefore really important to note the incredible contribution by our amazing conservation volunteers. Without the passion, commitment and enthusiasm of an army of volunteers, we simply wouldn’t be able to achieve the habitat management that we do. Between July and October at Ashted we had 418 volunteer engagements resulting in 1,914 hours contributed; at West Wickham & Coulsdon Common it totalled 1,550 hours; and at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common (where the period includes the annual volunteer summer break in August), volunteers contributed 1,489 hours, with 336 volunteer engagements. Attached to this report are the 2024-25 annual reports for the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMs) and the Section 106 Community Engagement Ranger report, plus the annual report of action under the Public Spaces Protection Order at Burnham Beeches.

### 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.

### **Nature Conservation and Resilience**

2. Practical habitat management activity included:
  - a. At Ashted Common:
    - I. Waymarking, bridge repairs and path maintenance during the summer months.
    - II. Expansion of grazing into new areas plus more extensive grazing of scrub grassland.
    - III. Scrub management work to manage riparian vegetation and maintain a mosaic of grass and scrub of varying ages.
    - IV. Leaky dam construction as part of the CAS supported project.
    - V. Staff from the Forestry Commission visited on September 18 2025 to view best practice in ancient tree management.
  - b. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:
    - I. Annual clearance of bracken on the heath and hillfort area at West Wickham Common
    - II. Stump grinding across the WW&CC's to facilitate grassland and heathland development
    - III. Vegetation on the steep chalk slopes across the WW&CC's managed with radio controlled robo-mower.
    - IV. All haymaking completed as part of the annual work programme to deliver Countryside Stewardship Agreement.
    - V. Contractors cleared large area of woodland as part of the ongoing management of Ash Dieback on New Hill, Farthing Downs.
  - c. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common:
    - I. Cattle grazed large areas of Burnham Beeches using the 'No Fence' system. Ponies grazed both sites and Stoke Common was grazed by 25 cattle via the grazier.
    - II. A full season of bracken control was undertaken by volunteers and staff at both locations.
    - III. Annual and cyclical cutting of fire breaks was carried out at Stoke Common during the period, along with the annual area-based cut and collect mowing. Volunteers have been carrying out scrub management in addition to contractors delivering some cyclical scrub cutting in line with the Stoke Common management plan.

- IV. At the Beeches an area of 4-ha of grant funded wood pasture restoration was carried out by contractors.
- V. Pond habitat restoration was undertaken at Top and Middle Ponds at the Beeches. This involved excavators and amphibious machines removing vegetation and silt from areas of the ponds. Works were based on a plan produced by the Freshwater Habitats Trust. Work was completed in October on time and on budget. All funding for this restoration work was provided by legacies.

3. Conservation activity highlights of the period were:

a. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common:

- I. A range of monitoring has been undertaken during the period by staff and volunteers including for vegetation, tree health and as part of a European wide survey of beech mast. Specialist contractors also undertook bat surveys in August confirming presence of 11 species of bats at the Beeches including the first 'in hand' identification of Brandt's, Whiskered and Barbastelle bats.
- II. During September and October, staff and volunteers began searching for a rare snail of UK ancient woodlands. *Spermodea lamellata* is almost extinct in continental Europe and disappearing fast from Britain and Ireland. Living in deep leaf litter under deciduous trees, this is an ancient woodland specialist and has suffered dramatic losses from clear felling and conifer plantations. After being found by Dr. Ben Rowson (President of the UK Conchological Society) in 2008, the species was rediscovered in October 2025. Rangers have been actively managing the site for this species and re-finding it shows that our efforts are making a difference. We were informed by the Conchological Society that the finding "proves the species is still just about extant in southern England".
- III. 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, and a year long visitor numbers count. An action plan to enable monitoring of the impact of visitor pressure on soils has been developed and will be implemented from 2026.
- IV. A recent survey led by lichenologists Neil Sanderson and Richard Todd (funded by SSE Energy Solutions), has revealed exciting findings about the ground-dwelling (terricolous) lichens of Burnham Beeches. The study uncovered a unique lichen community thriving in open woodland glades. The survey identified 37 species, including several rare and regionally significant lichens. Notably, *Lichenomphalia*

*hudsoniana*, a species typically found in upland peat soils, was recorded for the first time in Buckinghamshire.

- b. At Ashtead Common:
  - I. Participation in an international study into the effects of veteranisation of oak trees.
  - II. The decision has been taken not to work on the ancient oak pollards this autumn and winter due to the potential stress caused by the prolonged dry period earlier in the summer.
- c. At West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons:
  - I. Moth and butterfly recording continued as planned across all sites.
  - II. Reptile surveys continued at all sites and further amphibian surveys were carried out at the three ponds on Coulsdon Common.
  - III. Bird surveys were completed on all sites including skylark population monitoring on Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown.
  - IV. Dung beetle surveys started on grazed sites.
  - V. Bat surveys were carried out on the Coulsdon Commons, supported by the Surrey Bat Group.

## **Community and Stakeholder Engagement**

- 4. Across the estate the following visits were hosted to share experience:
  - a. At Ashtead Common:
    - I. The MP for Epsom and Ewell, Helen Maguire (whose constituency includes Ashtead), visited on October 31<sup>st</sup>.
    - II. Volunteers were engaged in practical conservation tasks including leaky dam construction. They also participated in butterfly, bird and tree veteranisation surveys, and helped with events.
    - III. The annual walk of the Epsom and Ashtead SSSI Forum took place on July 9<sup>th</sup>.
    - IV. The annual walk of the Ashtead Common Consultative Group was cancelled due to low attendance.
    - V. A bat walk in August was well attended.
    - VI. A besom broom making event held on October 28 to coincide with Halloween.
  - b. At Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common:
    - I. Volunteers have been undertaking infrastructure works, fence repairs, a range of survey activity, path repairs, and bracken control. In the autumn scrub management of areas of heathland and mire at both sites was carried out.

- II. Local Scout and Guide affiliated groups carried out habitat works at Burnham Beeches.
- III. The Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultation Group met for their annual site visit in July and looked at the pond restoration project. They fed back on plans for the reversion of part of the Stag Car Park to wood pasture.
- IV. The Community Engagement Rangers worked with local schoolchildren to produce posters on key visitor mitigation messages.
- V. Over 1,400 people enjoyed summer and Halloween trails along with a 'Creatures of the Night' walk.
- VI. External events held at the Beeches included the half marathon (1,300 participants), forest bathing, youth group and school visits.
- VII. The Community Engagement Rangers attended off-site community events in Burnham and Slough in support of partners.

c. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:

- I. Celebrating 50 years of Farthing Downs & Happy Valley SSSI, City of London rangers hosted a gathering at Farthing Downs to mark 50 years since its designation as a SSSI. The event featured guided walks led by local rangers, along with stalls providing information on the local heritage, archaeology, and grazing practices that sustain this unique landscape.
- II. As part of the City of London corporate volunteer programme, staff from the City Surveyor's Property Projects Group swapped their desks at the Guildhall for a day on the Commons, helping to clear large volumes of ragwort from the diverse sward of the chalk landscape.
- III. Geology students from UCL carried out an accompanied site visit to Riddlesdown Quarry.
- IV. Volunteers carried out a hay raking task to remove hay on the grassland glade near the Windmill Field. This annual task reduces soil nutrients to improve conditions for less common grasses and wildflowers.
- V. In September, our Farthing Downs volunteers skipped the usual volunteer task and enjoyed a special trip to Tower Bridge as part of the City's corporate volunteering days. Staff at Tower Bridge welcomed the group and gave them a fascinating behind-the-scenes experience. Highlights included exploring the walkways, crossing the glass floor and visiting the Bridge's control room to see how this iconic 139-year-old landmark is operated.
- VI. A "Meet the Ranger Day" was held at Farthing Downs in October. Rangers engaged with visitors, walkers and dog owners, taking the opportunity to promote good dog ownership as well as future events. Over 20 people used the new Paw Wash facility for which we received positive feedback.

## **5. Access and Recreation**

- I. Green flags were awarded to Farthing Downs, Coulsdon Common, Kenley Common, Riddlesdown, Spring Park, West Wickham Common, Burnham Beeches and Ashted Common.
- II. Green Heritage Awards were attained by Farthing Downs, Coulsdon Common, Kenley Common, Riddlesdown, West Wickham Common, Burnham Beeches and Ashted Common.
- III. On Ashted Common work to resurface a section of track was completed. In total 420m was completely resurfaced and an additional 670m was graded and rolled.
- IV. On WW&CC the corporate image board contract was awarded, and the successful company aims to start work on replacing all signs across WW&CC in January 2026.
- V. At BB&SC new signs were installed around the hillfort to promote the virtual reality interpretation available via a QR code.
- VI. The new information point was officially opened as part of the annual Lord Mayor's visit in September and new site signs were installed at Burnham Walk and Druid's Oak at the Beeches.
- VII. A visitor received a formal written warning after a dog was found worrying cows. In October a regular visitor received a Fixed Penalty Notice, issued under the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO) at BB, for repeated breaches of a PSPO, this was paid within 14 days of issue.
- VIII. The annual summary report of action under the Public Spaces Protection Order at Burnham Beeches is attached at Appendix 2.

## **6. Learning and Heritage**

- a. At Ashted Common:
  - I. A student from Cardiff University was supported for 13 weeks of work experience.
  - II. Pre-schoolers from Barnett Wood School visited on three occasions for nature walks.
  - III. A talk on ancient trees was given to Royal Holloway University.
- b. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:
  - I. Contractors and volunteers carried out essential management of the vegetation on the WW2 structures at Kenley Airfield.
  - II. The Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments (Heritage England) visited Kenley Common to review recent conservation works and agree the next phase of minor restoration requirements.
- c. At Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common:
  - I. A new group of students from Berkshire College of Agriculture started joining regular weekday volunteer tasks – they will be with us until June next year.

- II. Staff have continued to work with and support local schools including attending assemblies and working with them on mitigation posters.

## **7. Income Generation**

- I. Car parking income for WW&CC April – October 2025 was £21,351 gross.
- II. The Paw Wash facility at Farthing Downs made steady progress through the winter months. It is too early to tell if it will be successful and will provide a steady income stream.
- III. The 6-month trial of a coffee concession at Kenley Common started in September 2025. Early indications are that it is very welcomed by the local community.
- IV. Car parking income for Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common for April – October 2025 was £76,144
- V. At Burnham Beeches a 2-day film shoot using internal roads during September and October earned £12,240.
- VI. Licencing income from activities included £1,685 for a half-marathon.

## **8. People Management**

### **a. West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons**

- I. One of our apprentices completed their course and left the team to study for a BSc in nature conservation at the University of Kent, Canterbury.
- II. A new apprentice (our 4<sup>th</sup>) started in September and will be undertaking their work-based learning through Sparsholt College, Hampshire. The apprenticeship offers a chance to gain practical skills in conservation, habitat management, livestock handling, and visitor management alongside earning a college qualification and essential licences to work in conservation and countryside management.
- III. A new office Administrative Assistant starts in November, bringing the Support Services Team back to full strength.

### **b. Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common**

- I. Our 2023 intake apprentice became the new Assistant Ranger at BB&SC in August. Ruairi Long joined the team as a new apprentice from September.
- II. Kevin Yearley, formally an Assistant Ranger, moved into a Ranger role in July.
- III. The BB&SC team hosted the annual 'Commons Team' get-together in October with pond restoration, filming management

and the new information point being three areas of discussion and sharing of knowledge.

c. Ashtead Common

- I. The Assistant Ranger successfully applied for a vacant grade C Ranger post and commenced in the new role on September 22.

## 9. Risk Management

- I. At Ashtead Common tree safety inspections were conducted on two occasions - early September and the end of October - following storm events. The worst occurrence involved a tree partially blocking the A24. This was dealt with by the Ranger Team. Separately one ancient tree fell on a day that wasn't windy.
- II. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common post storm tree inspections were required following early autumn storm events. The Burnham Beeches car parks and cafe were closed on both occasions.
- III. Tree safety inspections are nearing completion and required works are underway and will be completed by end of March 2026.
- IV. Oak Processionary Moth nest removal was undertaken in July and August.
- V. Formal annual water buoy and six-monthly bridge, boardwalk and culvert inspections were completed along with any necessary remedial works.
- VI. All tree safety inspections completed at the West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons, the resulting works to be completed by February 2026.
- VII. Reinstatement of the livestock office following the fire in December 2025 was completed.
- VIII. Infrastructure Audits completed for all sites at WW&CC.
- IX. Staff managers have completed mandatory Health and Safety training modules held at the Guildhall.

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

**Appendix 2** – Annual summary report of action under the Public Spaces Protection Order at Burnham Beeches

### Background papers

- Slough CER Annual Report 2024-25 (available on request)



- Buckinghamshire 2024-25 SAMMs Report (available on request)

**Andrew Impey**

**Deputy Director Natural Environment (covering the Commons)**

**E: [andrew.impey@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.impey@cityoflondon.gov.uk)**