

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Epping Forest and Commons Committee	Dated: 26/01/2026
Subject: The Commons – Quarterly Update Nov-Dec 2025	Public
This proposal:	<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?	n/a
Has this funding source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
Report of: Katie Stewart, Executive Director Environment	For Information
Report author: Andrew Impey, Deputy Director, Natural Environment	

Summary

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

Despite a short reporting period of just two months, a huge amount of vital winter management work has occurred across all of the Commons, with the emphasis on scrub management. Volunteers have once again played a crucial role in this work through regular weekly work parties. Traditional end of year events such as wreath making and fungal forays were also enjoyed by many of our visitors and volunteers. In addition to the standard operational updates in this quarterly report, Section 9 is a first attempt to highlight some of the more strategic progress being made against annual plans and management plans.

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 Ashtead Common:**
 - i. Halo release work around ancient oak pollards commenced. No work is being undertaken on the trees themselves due to stress caused by the summer drought.
 - ii. A scrub management contract commenced to bring an additional 1ha of secondary growth into rotation.
 - iii. A second scrub management contract commenced to manage fire breaks and residential boundaries. This is aimed at increasing the sites resilience to fire.
 - iv. Volunteers have been busy managing scrub. The annual mega task occurred on January 8 to manage a scrub area in conjunction with other local volunteer groups.
 - v. More work on leaky dams occurred.
- b. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:**
 - i. Heather seeding at West Wickham Common using seed collected earlier in the year by volunteers.
 - ii. Vegetation clearance from ponds on Coulsdon Common.
 - iii. Scrub clearance in Riddlesdown Quarry to encourage chalk grassland species.
 - iv. Woodland glades cleared on Coulsdon Common.
 - v. Contractors cleared second area of woodland as part of the ongoing management of Ash Dieback on New Hill, Farthing Downs.
 - vi. Hazel coppicing at Spring Park.
 - vii. Hedge planting along bridleway at Kenley Common.
- c. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common:**
 - i. Around 4ha of scrub management work was carried out at BB and SC as per the management plans by volunteers, staff and contractors.
 - ii. Countryside stewardship supported work was delivered including for heathland restoration at Stoke Common and wood pasture restoration at Burnham Beeches.
 - iii. Follow up work at the BB ponds following major restoration in Sept and Oct – included the removal of rhizomes from removed vegetation that came to the surface as the ponds re-filled.
 - iv. An application has been submitted to Natural England for consent to remove part of the tarmacked Stag car park and restore it to wood pasture as part of a CAS funded and agreed project after consultation with the BBSC consultation group in 2025. The car park is historically far bigger than is needed and only a 1/3 has been used over the last 10 years. This reduction will be made permanent and the closed area restored to wood pasture over coming years. There will still be the same level of access and

parking available at the location, as has been the case for the last decade, and as such no impact on car park income is expected.

3. Conservation activity highlights of the period were:

- a. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common:
 - i. A report on surveys undertaken earlier in the year for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker reconfirmed the presence of a breeding population in and around Burnham Beeches.
 - ii. A fungal foray by the Bucks Fugus Group to Stoke Common in November, identified 20 new species for the site and 2 new species for Buckinghamshire
- b. At Ashtead Common:
 - i. Volunteers undertaking the annual breeding bird survey produced a report of their results for 2025. The number of species recorded was down on the high of last year to normal levels. However, the number of territories held was the lowest for eight years. Although disappointing, this does reflect the situation across Surrey.
- c. At West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons:
 - i. Five fungal forays held across the WW&CC's
 - ii. Surveys for brown hairstreak carried out on Kenley Common (24 eggs found)
 - iii. Joint dormouse surveys conducted on Farthing Downs & Happy Valley (LB) as part of NNR working.
 - iv. Breeding herd of 14 cows secured in winter quarters at Merlewood Estate Office (Calves due from 19th January onwards).

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

4. Across the estate the following visits were hosted to share experience:

- a. At Ashtead Common:
 - i. Volunteers achieved 1,021 hours in November and December.
 - ii. A Family Ranger Day event attracted 10 participants. This activity is aimed at encouraging young people to volunteer.
 - iii. A reindeer making event attracted 21 participants.
- b. At Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common:
 - i. Volunteers have been undertaking a range of activities across both sites in the period – including habitat works in line with management plans, office and livestock support, hydrology monitoring and ecological survey. A total of 735 hrs of volunteer commitment was record for the period

- ii. The annual Christmas task, wreath making and thank you event for all volunteers was held at both sites on the 13th December.
- iii. The Beeches team ran a number of events from waggy walks, to explore beyond the beeches, wreath making and festive trails enjoyed by over 300 people in the period. We also supported a visit for students from Reading University.
- iv. The Beeches hosted a Dadima's Countryside Walk - these are inter-generational walking groups which aim to make people of all cultural backgrounds, and all ages, feel welcome in the countryside.
- v. The Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultation Group were invited to an additional meeting for an online briefing on the Natural Environment Charity review. Members of the other Commons sites groups were invited to join in online as well
- vi. Members of the BBSC consultation group have also been invited to take part in surveys as part of a project looking at the feasibility of pine marten reintroduction into the area of the Beeches. Face to face online surveys will be taking place in January 2026
- vii. The annual and 5-year SAMMs review was undertaken with Buckinghamshire Council and Natural England. The review recognised the success of the project to date and discussed how it may be moved forward in line with current Bucks Local plan review.
- viii. The team met with Slough officers to review success of activity of the Slough 106 funded CER and how we can continue to work together in the coming year.

c. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:

- i. Scout groups visited Kenley & Coulsdon Common to learn about habitats and wildlife from rangers.
- ii. Three successful wreath making events held at the Merlewood Estate Office drawing new users to the sites.
- iii. Volunteers carried out tasks on all six of the WW&CC sites.
- iv. Applications for 2006 Green Flag / Heritage Awards submitted.
- v. Coffee concession on Kenley reached 6 months point- contract to be extended by an additional 6 months

5. Access and Recreation

- i. 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.
- ii. At BBSC - Annual messaging in place and sensitive areas closed to encourage visitors to keep to the main tracks during winter months. This is supported by winter path maintenance to ensure main paths are easy to find and follow during the autumn leaf fall period.

6. Learning and Heritage

- i. A student from Cardiff University was completed 13 weeks of work experience at Ashtead.

- ii. Rangers at WW&CC worked with teachers at Audley School, advising them on the creation of wildlife habitats and forest school initiatives.
- iii. Students from Berkshire College of Agriculture have continued to join regular weekday volunteer tasks at BBSC – they will be with us until June next year.
- iv. Staff at BBSC have continued to work with and support local schools including attending assemblies

7. Income Generation

- i. Car parking income for WW&CC 1st November – 31st December 2025 was £4,486
- ii. The Paw Wash facility at Farthing Down is making steady progress through the winter months. It is too early to tell if it will be successful and provide a steady income stream. It will be reviewed after 1 year
- 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- review in spring 2026
- iv. Car parking income for Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common for November – December 2025 was £21,557.

8. People Management, including Health & Safety

- a. West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons
 - i. A new Office Administrative Assistant started in November, bringing the Support Services Team back to full strength.
 - ii. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke common Tree safety inspections have been completed and work is underway in all areas and will be completed by end of March 2026.
 - iii. All tree safety inspections completed at the West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons, the resulting works to be completed by February 2026.
 - iv. Reinstatement of the livestock office following the fire in December 2025 was completed.
 - v. Infrastructure Audits completed for all sites at WW&CC.
 - vi. Staff managers have completed mandatory Health and Safety training modules held at the Guildhall.

9. Progress Against Key Targets

- I. At Ashtead Common:
 - i. Management of the ancient oak pollards is subject to Management Plan and Business Plan targets to work on 499 trees by 2031. Much of this work is funded by a Countryside Stewardship grant covering the same period. This is the second year out of four that we have been unable to claim the grant for working on the trees themselves (although we are working around them) which means a reduction of approximately £50,000 in grant income over the two years.

- ii. The Management Plan set a target to restore 3.6ha of secondary growth to grazed scrub grassland/ wood pasture during the life of the plan. This is now 65% complete.
- II. Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common
 - i. The annual and 5 yearly SAMMs review was completed with Buckinghamshire Council and Natural England. The development contribution collected by the Council to date in 2025/26 is £24,701 and a total of £1,507,732 has been received to fund the SAMMs since 2020/21.
 - ii. All Countryside Stewardship funded work for 2025 has been completed as required, evidence gathered and the grant received to the value of £71,023.
- III. West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons
 - i. NVC Surveys for Kenley Common and Farthing Downs completed.
 - ii. New Byelaw Boards tendering completed, and contract awarded with installation due to commence in January 2026.
 - iii. All Countryside Stewardship works completed across the WW&CC's funded through this year's grant which totalled £95,452.
 - iv. Joint survey for Dormice (City of London and LBC Rangers) in the South Downs National Nature Reserve.
 - v. New apprentice started in September 2025

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