

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Epping Forest and Commons Committee	Dated: 29/06/2026
Subject: The Commons – Quarterly Update March-May 2026	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	• 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: Anna Burns, Deputy Director Natural Environment (covering the Commons)	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to present key data from across the Commons for the period March – May 2026. Finance and risk reporting is being undertaken through separate reports.

The period saw the move from winter management into spring activity across all of the Commons. Volunteers have once again played a crucial role in this work through regular weekly work parties.

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. 16 Belted Galloway cows arrived from Surrey Wildlife Trust for the summer grazing programme.
 - ii. Volunteers have been mainly engaged in processing previously cut material and eco piling, removal of invasive species, and tree popping.
- b. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:
 - i. Volunteers have been assisting the Ranger at Riddlesdown to replace protective fencing around the cluster of rare Juniper on the chalk downland. Whilst carrying out this work, several Juniper saplings have been found naturally regenerating.
 - ii. Over 800 native trees were planted to create 2 new hedges on Farthing Downs and Kenley Common with support from the Carbon Action Strategy team. These will be brought into a traditional hedgelaying rotation once established.
 - iii. Temporary electric fencing has been installed at Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown to protect ground nesting skylark from disturbance and reduce predation.
 - iv. Contractors finished extensive tree safety work around high use paths and residential boundaries on all sites including dismantling ash affected by ash dieback. A contract to remove leftover tree stumps from a multi-year chalk grassland restoration project on Riddlesdown has finished.
 - v. The Ranger team has welcomed 14 newborn lambs to our flock of Jacob sheep. After spending their first few weeks safely settled in the barn, the ewes and lambs are now out grazing on Coulsdon Common and are adapting well to life out on the reserve.
 - vi. The livestock have been carrying out spring grazing across the grassland compartments on the Coulsdon Commons. Sussex cattle on NoFence collar technology have successfully grazed areas on Kenley Common around the perimeter of the airfield, helping to diversify wildflowers in the grassland sward.
- c. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common:
 - i. Two thirds of the tarmac area of the Stag Car park was removed and the restoration of the area to wood pasture was begun – work was funded by the Carbon Removal project.
 - ii. Livestock fences were moved around the Stag to encompass the new 'restored' area and a section of land that has been mown annually for a number of years. Both areas will now be within the grazing area.
 - iii. Volunteers helped with the above fencing projects and other fencing repairs across Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common prior to the return of the Cows and ponies.
 - iv. Livestock returned to both open spaces during May.

3. Conservation activity highlights of the period were:

- a. At Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common:
 - i. A staff training day on the internationally rare Forster's Knot hole moss (*Codonoblepharon fosteri*) was undertaken.
 - ii. The team have been working with Buckinghamshire Council re a Local plan and proposals for a revision of the existing SAMMs agreement.
 - iii. Annual SAMMs related monitoring has been undertaken on species and paths during the period.
 - iv. Surveys have included wildlife tree and breeding territories of lesser spotted woodpeckers, the latter supported by the Bucks Bird club.
 - v. Annual whole site reptile surveys undertaken at BB and SC in the period – delivered by 18 volunteers over 2 months and involving over 90 individual survey sessions.
 - vi. The team hosted visits to the Beeches by the Natural England (NE) local planning team – and also met with the NE deputy director to look at management of the whole SAC at Burnham Beeches, the section managed by the charity and those managed by third parties. Both meetings were in May.

- b. At Ashted Common:
 - i. Volunteers commenced butterfly and breeding bird surveys. Firecrest, cuckoo, garden warbler and willow warbler have all been heard.

- c. At West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons:
 - i. An ecologist has been appointed to carry out National Vegetation Classification (NVC) surveys on Kenley Common and Coulsdon Common between April and September. This will assess the full suite of vascular plant species present and will inform the impact of long-term grazing and management on these sites.
 - ii. The Conservation Ranger has been undertaking breeding bird surveys across the Coulsdon Commons. Initial findings and highlights include breeding territories for rare downland birds including yellowhammer, skylark and whitethroat.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

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

- a. At Ashted Common:
 - i. Volunteers contributed 590 hours in March, 366 hours in April and 486 hours in May, making a total of 1,442 hours.

- ii. Duke of Edinburgh Award (DoE) volunteering commenced in May. Opportunities are being developed to offer students from the City of London Freemans School DoE placements from September.
- b. At Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common:
 - i. Volunteers have been undertaking a range of activities across both sites in the period – including tidy up of habitat works, path repair works, car park and sign maintenance and livestock support, hydrology monitoring and ecological survey. A total of 1526 hrs of volunteer commitment was recorded for the period
 - ii. The Junior Rangers programme, aimed at young people aged 11 – 18, held 3 more events in the period. Volunteer events were also held with local cubs and brownies.
 - iii. The public consultation on PSPO renewal started on the 18th May with notices on site, local public notice boards, social media, new papers and via direct contact with interested groups and statutory consultees – the consultation runs until the 30th June.
- c. At the West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons:
 - i. The Conservation Ranger gave talks to two local interest groups on the
 - ii.
 - iii. Volunteers have been working across the sites delivering a variety of practical conservation tasks during including daily livestock checks, rights of way maintenance, scrub removal on chalk grassland and repairs to site infrastructure.

5. Access and Recreation

- i. The annual event programme included 2 x 2hr meet the Ranger sessions attracting 245 people, 14 licenced events for schools and other organisations regular volunteer supported health and waggy walks and events encouraging local residents to explore opportunities for recreation in and around slough.
- ii. At the WW&CCs, contractors have almost completed the installation of 60 new entrance signs as part of a two-year capital project. The new signs have replaced the traditional black byelaw boards, many of which were either in poor condition or missing and had to be removed due to structural safety concerns. The replacement signs are constructed from sustainable Accoya, a high-performance modified timber sourced from sustainably managed forests and guaranteed to last for 25 years. There are three different sign designs according to locations including large boards for roadside entrances, small monolith boards for quieter entrances and large noticeboards at key entrances like car parks that can display changing posters throughout the year. They provide updated information on site rules and byelaws, ecology, history, and

- key visitor information, while also reflecting the sites' National Nature Reserve designation and other designations.
- iii. The WW&CC Rangers led 7 public events including bat and wildflower walks on Farthing Downs and Spring Park and dawn chorus walks on Coulsdon Common and Farthing Downs engaging over 110 people.

6. Learning and Heritage

- i. 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.
- ii. Staff at BBSC have continued to work with and support local schools including attending assemblies at schools in Farnham common.
- iii. At Ashtead, 44 young people were engaged in educational activities, from scout groups (Beavers and Squirrels) and the local primary school.
- iv. A talk given to Ashtead WI was attended by 55 people.
- v. A talk was given to Old Coulsdon WI attended by 70 people about the WW&CCs.
- vi. Volunteers from the Kenley Revival Project have given three public talks including one to a local Primary School on the history of RAF Kenley.

7. Income Generation

- i. Car parking income for WW&CC 1st Jan– 1st June 2026 was £15,482
- 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 in September 2026
- iii. 1 year trial of a coffee concession at Farthing Downs started in April 2026.
- iv. Net car parking income at Burnham Beeches for the period was £34099.

8. People Management, including Health & Safety

- a. West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons
 - i. 3 operational Ranger positions are currently vacant at WW&CCs including a site Ranger for Kenley Common, Information Ranger and Livestock Ranger.
- b. Burnham Beeches
 - i. 6 monthly Tree safety inspections have been undertaken during the period at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.
 - ii. There was a deliberate wildfire set at Burnham Beeches at the end of April at 5pm. Fortunately, residential staff on the way home spotted the fire and the local team were able to control it's spread until the fire

service arrived to fully extinguish and damp down. However, the late duty Ranger found that the fire was restarting around a large fallen tree trunk at 21.30 that evening. They were supported by other residential duty team to cut up the log and ensure fully extinguished – the location was re-checked overnight. The fire was set at the edge of the mire at Burnham Beeches and if it hadn't been spotted when it was did have the potential to spread.

c. Ashtead Common

- i. A new Assistant Ranger – Simone Oderanile – started in April. This fills a vacancy held open while our structure was being considered following the previous Superintendents retirement.

9. Progress Against Key Targets

I. At Ashtead Common:

- i. With the increased number of cows – 16 this year instead of 10 – all areas earmarked for the expansion of grazing in the 2021 to 2031 management plan will be brought into rotation. In total that is just over 25% of the common.

II. Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

- i. Grazing plans at both BB and SC are underway. A 3-yr review of the contract grazing agreement at Stoke Common was completed.

III. West Wickham & Coulsdon Commons

- i. Site visits are underway with Natural England advisors to prepare for entering a new 10-year Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier (CSHT) for the WW&CCs. This will start in January 2027 once the existing scheme comes to an end in December 2026.

10. People NEC Grant Funding Model Information

- i. The Grant Funding Model (GFM) principles and arrangements gained their final approval at Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee on 19 February 2026 to apply to all the Natural Environment Charities from 1 April 2026.
- ii. P&R Committee also agreed the approval process for the associated Framework Document which was delegated to the NECR Co-sponsors in consultation with the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Natural Environment Committees and Finance Committee.
- iii. The Framework Document is intended to serve as a supporting governance document for the grant funding arrangements between the City Corporation as funder and the NE Charities/City Corporation as trustee. To assist with good internal governance, it describes the organisational

arrangements and summarises the principles for the provision of grant funding by the City Corporation to the NE Charities. However, it is also made publicly available to provide transparency and enable those interested in providing external grant funding and donations to the NE Charities to understand their funding position more clearly, and to provide assurance on charity performance, monitoring and levels of public engagement.

- iv. This Framework Document has now been approved and published on the City's website on the Corporate Governance and Natural Environment pages.

Anna Burns

Deputy Director Natural Environment (covering the Commons)

E: Anna.burns@cityoflondon.gov.uk