

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons	14 th November 2016
Subject: Superintendent's Update	Public
Report of: Superintendent of 'The Commons'	For Information
Summary	
<p>This report provides a general update on issues across the nine sites within 'The Commons' division that may be of interest to members and is supplementary to the monthly email updates.</p>	
Recommendation	
<p>Members are asked to note the contents of this report.</p>	

PLANNING CONTROL

Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common

1. An Information report concerning planning matters and environmental impacts/monitoring, has been provided to members separately for members consideration.

PARTNERSHIPS

Kenley Revival update.

2. **The Project plan has been revised** to make it more manageable and to focus on the outputs of the project. The next set of project themes to go to tender will be Interpretation which is the second largest capital spend. This will encompass the onsite signage and travelling exhibition inclusive of development, design, manufacture and installation. The aim is to tender by mid-November with returns due in January with work commencing in Spring 2017.
3. **Human resource for the project has been flagged as a significant risk** to the project with underspend and delivery of activities as evidence of this. Also following the unsuccessful tender of the Education Resource Designer it is indicative that for aspects to be delivered in-house and de-risk briefs for specialist consultants we require additional resource to address this gap in skills and also time to deliver these aspects. As aspects of the project require significant development from the bid stage in order to deliver them there are also a number of tasks which have developed which have been identified as sitting outside the remit of the Project Manager and Learning & Volunteer

Officer that need to be addressed. Guidance has been sought from HLF with regards to restructuring the activity grid and directing funds for additional resource and this will be discussed in further detail at the Project Board meeting on 28th October.

4. **The Kenley Revival project launch** event was held on 11th September in the Portcullis Club field and airfield perimeter. The event included a number of attractions including full size replica spitfire and Hurricane, a Battle of Britain exhibition trailer, 1940's food tasting, guided walks, land train tours and community stalls. This event has traditionally been organised by the Kenley Airfield Friends Group. Around 3,500 visitors attended which exceeded the target figure. Evaluation provided positive feedback with 100% visitors stating that they would return and 100% of volunteers would volunteer again. Following an evaluation meeting a meeting with members of the KAFG and COL is being scheduled for mid-November to function as the organising committee of next year's event which is to be the largest event in the HLF project
5. **Conservation works have been delayed** due to the low number of tender returns and an overall consensus that neither of the submissions were of acceptable standard. We are looking to retender in mid-November but are awaiting a suitable source of 'original' bricks and also the outcome of the planning application which is an acknowledged risk in the project due to Croydon Council's backlog of applications. In the meantime we will have the asbestos removed from KC52 with a contractor site visit on the 27th October to discuss the timeline for this. In the meantime we have also tendered for the relocation of RAF Kenley tribute in order to further de-risk the conservation works but this was unsuccessful with one return that was significantly higher in cost. Having sought advice from HLF we will retender for this again whilst indicating our expected cost from the outset.
6. **Evaluation consultant retender has been successful** and has been awarded to Sam Culture. Initial kick off meeting scheduled for 3rd November.

WORK PROGRAMME – HIGHLIGHTS.

The West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons.

7. Volunteers have been working hard to begin opening up more of the area known as the Grove on Coulsdon Common. This wood pasture habitat is both ancient and rare and is something we are keen to promote. We will be working closely with local community groups and our very own Chain Gang to clear areas of secondary woodland. Sussex cattle will be grazing this area in the autumn.
8. Our butterfly transect volunteer Bill Bessant found an adult Brown Hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*) basking in the sun on Main Common, Kenley. This butterfly is rarely seen as an adult on our sites; however we do know it breeds on Kenley as we have found a couple of eggs on the caterpillars food plant the

Blackthorn in previous years. This is fantastic news as it is registered as a Priority Species on the UK BAP.

9. Farthing Downs witnessed the first 'Hay Cut' to be taken from the newly restored field called 13 Acre Bury. Although the vegetation was not good enough for animals to eat, the removal of the nutrients is key to restoring the chalk down land plant species. The cutting and collection will continue for a couple more years and with the long term plan of introducing grazing, the wild flowers should start to colonise over the coming 10 years. During the war the fields on New Hill were planted with crops to help with the war effort and later abandoned due to their poor soils. Scrub and young trees grew up in a dense layer blocking the light from the ground and killing off the grassland.
10. During September and October contractors carried out scrub management and tree safety works adjacent to the A22 at Riddlesdown. Trees within this area were poorly rooted on shallow chalk soil and were leaning downhill towards the busy main road. They were increasingly likely to fall into the road as they grow larger so the risk has been removed. The best long term solution is to restore a more open landscape of grassland and younger shrubs maintained by grazing and regular shrub cutting.
11. A small area of Sweet Chestnut has recently been re-coppiced at Spring Park. Coppicing, which involves cutting a multi stemmed tree down to just above ground level, promotes fresh new growth which is better at resisting disease, stress and strong winds. Other wildlife can also benefit from increased light levels reaching the forest floor and at Spring Park native tree species such as Silver Birch, Cherry and Alder have come in abundance amongst the chestnuts.
12. The 1st Coney Hall Rainbows explored West Wickham Common with the ranger. The enthusiastic young naturalists were looking for signs of autumn and were impressed by the huge crop of acorns adorning the oak trees this year. They also learnt about some of the jobs the rangers do to keep the site welcoming for both visitors and wildlife. Whilst on the heathland the Rainbows decorated old tree stumps with pebbles, leaves and grass to create some fantastic natural art.
13. Successful events at the WW&CCs included-
 - On the evening of 28th September rangers led a very successful bat walk on Kenley Common. Armed with several echo-locators members of the public were treated to displays by Pipistrelles and Noctules swooping down over their heads.
 - Meet the Ranger at Riddlesdown Common, Sunday 9th October.
 - Meet the Ranger at Farthing Downs and New Hill, Saturday 15th October.

Burnham Beeches.

14. The programme of summer pollarding young pollards is complete with 80 trees cut.

15. Further successful tests of the invisible fencing system have been completed in the largest of the invisible fence paddocks (covering 90Ha) which includes Egypt Woods, Halse Drive, Victoria Drive and Mendelssohn's slope. Four animals grazed for four weeks. Two cows are currently in a temporary enclosure on the mire where a new invisible fence system is being trialled. The new system uses FM wave length rather than AM to transmit a signal to the collars worn by the cattle. This new system has the potential to create larger loops/enclosures
16. The end of season cut of areas including areas on Pumpkin Hill, Birch car park, Little Common and roadside edges on Sir Henry Peeks Drive and parts of Hawthorn Lane have been completed. Further areas including Tower wood will be completed over the coming month. This is aimed at managing any encroachment of bramble and young scrub that has not been dealt with by the livestock.
17. Volunteers have cleared birch scrub in the mire, stacking some into habitat piles and burning the rest. They have been joined by volunteers from Berkshire College of Agriculture, Acorn, and Skillforce.
18. Students from a local film school spent two days filming in Victoria Drive for an assignment.
19. Successful events at the Beeches included -
 - The local community Church group held a bear hunt for 40 children in early September
 - Godolphin school visited over two days with 120 children and again two weeks later with a further 120 children. Cippenham nursery and Primary schools visited over five days with a further 3 days planned. Farnham Common Infant school used the car parks as a base for their walk to school initiative. Ecole Jeannine Manuel from Bedford Square in London brought 30 students to study the geology trail.
 - Scout groups from Loddon and a district scout group both used the site for night hikes.
 - 200 pupils from Farnham Common Infant school used the Halloween trail on 21st October

Stoke Common.

20. Contractors have started work on replacing 550 metres of fencing on the eastern side of the main common.
21. A contractor was brought in to do a day's mulching of tree stumps and ground disturbance to stimulate germination of heathland plants
22. The grazing season, with 21 cattle from a local grazier, is now complete. There was one incident where three cows escaped from the common after gates were stolen overnight. The cows were quickly returned with no injuries

to them or members of the public. New gates have been purchased and the gaps filled on a temporary basis.

Ashtead Common.

23. A project, delivered in partnership with a charity called Living Streets to surface a short section of footpath near to the Wells Estate, has been completed. The path provides an all-weather link between the Wells Estate and existing surfaced paths on Ashtead Common, enabling parents to walk to a nearby primary school. A number of families and local people assisted our volunteers to complete the path.
24. Discussions are progressing with two potential grazing partners to establish a new model for sustainable, low intensity conservation grazing across the site.
25. The autumn and winter work programme has commenced with a package of tree work already completed in the Wood Field area. Work to restore an appropriate scrub-grassland mosaic continues and veteran tree work will commence soon.
26. 803 volunteer hours were achieved in September. October's figure will be augmented by a group of corporate volunteers from Exxon Mobil who worked to increase the width of a firebreak.

Support Services.

27. The Support Service's Team has had an intense period of activity assisting with the establishment of the Kenley Heritage Project Team including staff induction and training, infrastructure development, finance, and coordinating events.
28. The Support Services team also supported the Project Launch at the Kenley Heritage day on 11 September. This was the first time that the team had taken the lead arranging the day with our partners.
29. The team also assisted with coordinating the Open Spaces Department 'Management Conference aboard HMS Belfast on 19 October 2016. Led by the Superintendent, the theme for the Conference was 'Planning Together, Managing Collaboratively, Delivering Locally' and had presentations and workshops on 'The programme Board' method of project delivery, 'Our Culture' and 'Our future'. The Superintendent is currently awaiting feedback from those that attended and an action plan will be produced to ensure that progress continues to be made.
30. The Open Spaces staff visit will take place at Burnham Beeches on 16 November 2016. The team is currently busy organising the schedule of events for this day ensuring an educational and enjoyable day for all.
31. Sickness absence continues to be of concern across the Division with some longer term issues currently affecting two members of staff and shorter term issues affecting two others.
32. Interviews were held and a candidate offered the post for a six month Temporary Assistant Ranger position to help during the busy winter pollarding period. It is anticipated the post will commence mid November.

33. A review of weekend and evening Ranger team rota's has been concluded within the various teams. This has achieved service improvements and resolved policy and operational inconsistencies across the Division on a cost neutral basis.

INCIDENTS

Burnham Beeches

34. Following the recent robbery at the Burnham Beeches café (reported at September meeting of this Committee) the Superintendent can confirm that the police have raised their presence at the café, the Café's Safe Systems of Work have been reviewed and the CCTV system has been assessed and is currently being modernised.
35. There were two incidents involving vandalism to signs on site; the first involved the sign at the main entrance which had been pushed over and snapped off and the second was removal of 'dogs on-lead' signs at the café. Signs in both cases have been repaired and replaced.
36. An attempt was made to gain access to the donations box in the information point adjacent to the cafe. It was unsuccessful and no money was stolen.
37. There were two incidents of verbal abuse towards staff, both of which were reported to the police. In the first incident the suspect admitted to being verbally abusive and agreed to moderate his behaviour in future. The second incident is still in the hands of the police.
38. Two five bar gates were stolen overnight from Stoke Common, enabling the livestock to escape onto the highway. Staff and the grazier attended site and returned the cattle to safety without injury.
39. A Jeep 4wd became firmly stuck and was abandoned within the curtilage of the site. As the vehicle was deemed to be on private land South Bucks District Council agreed to locate the owner and arrange removal. The vehicle remained on site for three weeks and was eventually set on fire at which point it was removed.
40. Other incidents dealt with were of as fairly minor nature but included 2 dog related incidents and a mistaken report of livestock within the invisible fence area being out on the road.

Ashtead Common.

41. None

The West Wickham and Coulson Commons

42. In September vehicle crashed through the wooden bollards on Stites Hill Road at the Junction of Homefield Road, Coulsdon Common. The driver was taken to hospital.
43. Rangers responded to reports of a motorcycle being ridden across Farthing Downs. The rangers arrived in time to see the motorcycle with rider and pillion disappearing onto adjoining land. The incident was reported to the police.

44. Rangers intercepted a vehicle driving on Kenley Common. It was a father teaching his son to drive; they were duly escorted from the site.
45. A car collided with one of the Division's cows at night on Farthing Downs. The cow was located the following day and appeared to have only superficial injuries which were dealt with by Rangers. The cow is being monitored. The car was quite badly damaged and although the police are not thought to have received a report of the incident from the driver. An insurance claim is awaited and this may be contested once the full details are known. All cows have high visibility leg bands and warning signage is appropriately placed. Cattle have been grazing on the Common for approximately 15 years. An approach will be made to Croydon Highways Dept to revisit proposals to reduce the speed limit from 'unrestricted' to 30 mph.

FILMING, MAJOR EVENTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

46. None.

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