



## Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultative Group - Draft Minutes

5<sup>th</sup> February 2025 – 7.00pm

Members Present	Affiliation
Benjamin Murphy CC	Chairman, Epping Forest and Commons Committee
Caroline Haines CC	Deputy Chairman, Epping Forest and Commons Committee (Online)
Cllr. Carol Linton	Burnham Parish Council
Katie Ayres	Burnham Beeches Volunteers Group
Peter Harding	Farnham and Hedgerley Community Church
Jim Haran	Nightingale Park Residents Association
Mary Kohlhase	The Avenue Residents Association
Vivienne Ely	Joggers and Wheelers Society
Mark Frater	Local Business Representative
Josh Turner	National Trust Cliveden
Martin Albertini	Bucks Invertebrate Group
Keith Greenough	Burnham Beeches Rotary Club
Jim Rose	Bucks Bird Club
Tim Crawford	National Trust – Cliveden
Joshua Turner	National Trust – Cliveden
Martin Albertini	Bucks Invertebrate Group
Officers Present	
Geoff Sinclair	Superintendent (Assistant Director) - The Commons
Martin Hartup	Head Ranger - Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common
Helen Read	Conservation Officer, Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common
Deborah Harris	Support Services Officer, Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common
Joshua Nathan	Community Ranger, Sec106 Slough
Jordan Payne	Community Ranger, Sec106 Buckinghamshire

### **1. Welcome and Apologies**

Chair thanked those present for their attendance. Apologies were received from:

Andy McVeigh	Bucks County Recorder, Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland
Angus Wilkinson	Conservation Officer, Burnham Beeches
Verderer Paul Morris	Epping Forest and Commons Committee
Julia Carey	Countryside Officer, Buckinghamshire Council
Jonathan Jones	Ecological Volunteer & Local resident
Cllr. Jenny Quilter	Farnham Royal Parish Council
Sue Saville	Secretary, Dorneywood Trust
Lisa Pope	Burnham Health Promotion Trust
Laura Jordan	Farnham Common Junior School
Les Davies	The Scout Association
Stephen Knight	Chilterns Nordic Walking Group

## **2. Minutes of the last meeting** - agreed and no further matters arising.

## **3. Assistant Director's Update**

Thank you to those attending this meeting.

- Helen Read Conservation Officer – leaving end July 2025.
- Introduction of Angus Wilkinson – Conservation Officer, apologies sent.
- Katie Stewart – new Executive Director of Environment Dept. joined The City of London Chief Officer team autumn 2024.
- DEFRA/RPA dispute regarding Countryside Stewardship grant – City of London challenged a decision by the Rural Payments Agency to cut the grant previously agreed for the management of ancient trees by 90%. Following two years' work ultimately the City of London's case was agreed almost in full.
- Ambition 25, an update of this ongoing staff review was explained. Major administrative review of approximate 3,500 City of London job specifications covering 2,900 job titles.
- Burnham Beeches 10-year management plan now has a five-year Business plan to assist with budgetary predictions and project planning.
- Charity review is being undertaken by the City of London. 8 Natural Environment charities are currently being assessed. Changes to the charities can change the governance of sites and allow for more independence regarding local funding and a simplification of the budget system. Expected confirmation of the timetable and final update is expected March 2025.

## **4. Review of the Annual Works programme 2024 - 2025**

### **2024 Update – Martin Hartup – Head Ranger**

#### **Introduction of Byelaws at Stoke Common**

Reviewed by the meeting to inform them of the basis of what could be included as a Byelaw if introduced to this site. Various items covered by Statutory Powers will not be included in the Byelaws.

Clarification list below of some examples: -

- Vehicles – Motor Bikes/Quad bikes off road - statutory power.
- BBQ's and Fires - Byelaw.
- Fungi Picking – Byelaw.
- Dog fouling – PSPO or possibly included as a byelaw, also an option. Good evidence of this issue at Stoke Common for PSPOs to be used.
- DNUEC - Dogs not under effective control - disturbing wildlife, PSPO an option, if we can show it is affecting people's enjoyment of Stoke Common, could also be included as a byelaw. Ideal situation would be to have dogs on lead on request seasonally to protect ground nesting birds.
- Camping
- Cutting and removal of vegetation or removal of anything onsite.
- Metal detecting/drones/model planes – byelaws or statutory power.
- Feeding/petting of livestock, even as a wellbeing act, New Forest manages this issue with a PSPO.
- Vandalism.
- Horse riding and cycling off paths.
- Fly tipping/garden rubbish.

The Burnham Beeches Ranger team that are authorised can issue a PSPO or an external agent can be used on site.

### **Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

- **Environment Act 2021** - requirement of this act outlines the importance of this strategy to help with Nature Conservation. Bucks Council working on this and devising a local habitat map with biodiversity priorities. This project will help with planning and biodiversity issues.
- **Landscape project** - is allowing local landowners around Burnham Beeches to meet. First group meeting undertaken with landowners between Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common and allowed for a positive discussion.
- Taplow New town queried – proposed planning of a very large new development outside of Taplow. Angus Wilkinson to follow up on this plan that recently came into the public knowledge. Going forward Angus will now deal with all planning requests involving Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.

### **Migration and Community Engagement – Rangers annual update.**

#### **Introduction to Jordan Payne, Bucks Community Ranger and Josh Nathan, Slough Community Ranger.**

- Continued presence on site, 7.5 - 15 hours patrolling per week, with an introduction of static patrols.
- Quarterly seasonal patrols involving the BB Ranger team. Use of “Survey 123” for data recording.
- 01.04.2024 – 31.03.2025, 1074 conversations tackling site issues, 84 PSPO conversations to re-educate visitors, 304 negative behaviours noted.
- Practical mitigation has allowed creation of dead hedges on the Burnham Beeches site, built to protect or block access. Closure of paths is occurring seasonally to stop new routes being created or prevent damage from older routes no longer required.
- Events/activities include mitigation key messages. Trike bike is a new method of educating/engaging visitors as portable around the site. Various tasks/games spell out the importance messages to visitors to consider the site. Waggy Walks and Secret Life of Trees are amongst numerous walks and school visits also undertaken.
- Monitoring Strategy has allowed survey to be devised to measure baseline data to enable reviews of the work being undertaken on an annual basis.
- BB ECO Volunteers assisting with surveys helping measure data for mitigation.
- Flag the Poo has successful as a way of highlighting dog fouling to visitors and educate dog users.
- Work in then the wider community aims to reduce pressure on Burnham Beeches. Working with new housing developments encouraging the public to visit alternative local woodland nature sites nearer to their residential homes. As per the new Horlicks development in Slough liaising with Josh for activities nearby.
- Beyond the Beeches walks off the Beeches have highlighted local routes away from the Beeches site.

- Knowledge sharing with City of London Natural Environment Dept. Sites and Council Community Engagement Rangers very beneficial.
- Maintaining, monitoring, surveying, visitor Count, guided walks, soil Sampling. and development of outreach projects all planned for 2025/2026.

**Q:** How do you feel dead hedges are working?

**A:** Success rate is visible as they are reducing the footprint in these areas allowing natural recovery.

**Q:** As den building is not allowed/encouraged on Burnham Beeches site where can parents go locally.

**A:** Information is provided onsite via QR codes informing visitors of alternative sites that encourage den building and other children's activities.

**Q:** Waggy Walks expansion queried as could be seen as an established dog walking activity. Same attendees each week, therefore not educating site dog walkers away from the site.

**A:** To assist with this issue the days/times of walks are being staggered and meeting point at Burnham Beeches but walks planned away from the site are scheduled.

**Q:** How will monitoring work for all the sites? What's the plan for knowledge sharing.

**A:** Annual planning meetings whole team reviews including the management team, allows knowledge sharing. Data is reviewed regularly to show impacts to the site.

## **Projects Update for 2025**

### **Achievements and Wildlife habitats work 2024.**

- Young Pollard – x 300 worked upon.
- Proping work scheduled for several of the Ancient trees.
- Wood Pasture, restoration work being undertaken on Sevenways Plain.
- Heathland Restoration, contractors/volunteers working on 6 hectares at Stoke Common.
- No fence grazing working consistently well.
- Sensory Trail launched in Sept. 2024, a new leaflet 'QR' codes to assist.
- New signage on sites.
- New Information Point re-furbish - deadline March 2025. Focus of our old trees including the mitigation message throughout.
- Ranger team patrolling using electric bikes saving on our vehicles.
- Varied site visits from schools to SAMM's project, and Natural England.
- OPM management still ongoing with controls in place.
- Filming - seasonal income benefitting the site.
- Community and Meet the Rangers event on site working with the mitigation requirements.
- Volunteers - reptile surveys, deadwood log piles, access improvements to livestock fencing varied and good team helping the ranger team.
- New staff: – Izzy Bassick/ Kevin Yearly joined the team summer of 2024, Ranger Nick Haugh retired after 43 years of service with the City of London.

**Q:** How is the site progressing with Digital Development?

**A:** The information point will have active elements using new technology. The SAMMs Team have a project to develop further electronic interpretation over the next 1 – 2 years. QR codes are on the sculpture trail in addition to Seven ways Plain information board

## Plans for 2025

- Annual Old Pollard programme.
- Propping of several ancient trees.
- Information Point refurbish.
- Access Audit.
- Filming Project.
- Livestock holding area.

- Carbon Removal Project, a City of London project, to assist lowering carbon levels. Various projects have been suggested to help with this reduction and are ongoing including - Fire protection, equipment and training, Tree protection, Pollard propping, grey Squirrel control management and surveys. Reversion of the Stag car park back to heathland, this is the quietest car park on Burnham Beeches. An explanation on the history of this under used car park was given. Stopping use of the top bay for parking is a possibility. This car park raises an income of £6,000.00 annually. Visit to review this area to be scheduled for the BBSCCG site walk, July 2025. A proposal would be submitted to EFCC Committee for approval prior to consent being requested from Natural England. Estimate of 2026 for delivery of this project. The car park is required in 2025 to allow delivery of the pond project.

**Q:** Where else can visitors park?

**A:** Other car parks on site are available The Dell or Lord Mayors Drive at main common usually have more than enough capacity.

**Q:** How often is the main car park on Lord Mayors Drive full?

**A:** Very rarely it is completely full, only occasionally or red-letter days -bank holidays.

**Q:** New 'No Stopping' signs appeared around the site on National Highway roads. What do the Burnham Beeches team think about them?

**A:** These were not unexpected as they were planned following a public consultation 4 years ago – unfortunately they do not look like we expected. The proposal was for low wooden posts. Buckinghamshire Council commented that the current posts are incorrect and will be rectified but it may take some time – initially they will do a height reduction and then look whether some signs can be installed on other nearby existing posts. BB supportive of the process and will help to allow for changes.

**Q:** Will National Highways address the damaged verges due to contractors like City Fibre and Cadent working in the area.

**A:** Dialogue is ongoing with National Highways and where possible we will request assistance or notify them of these issues.

## Visitor Count

- 10 yearly review scheduled for Feb 2025 - Nov 2025, x 14 dates planned through the year, site opening to site closing time. Survey uses a previously proved model supported by statistics Professor from Manchester University, working along with data from Burnham Beeches built-in traffic counters on site, estimated data system is far more accurate than other methods, offering like for like data comparison. Data is vital to for City projections, externally for mitigation for the SAMM's project and grant applications.

## **Pond Works**

- 2016 Biological Survey highlighted ponds habitats were declining.
- Listed in current Management Plan after consultation in 2019.
- Initially leak repair required in middle pond dam, now rectified, and silt survey undertaken. 3 years survey work confirms no Great Crested Newts present.
- Renovation of the ponds will be start this year, first task to involve large machinery and barrier fencing.
- Project specifications being devised, contractors procured, plans will then go to Natural England for approval, specification - Angus Wilkinson. Update summer 2025.
- Ancient Tree Conference planned for a x 2-day conference locally (Taplow Court) and on Burnham Beeches site on 25/26 June 2025. Arb Association/Ancient Tree Forum hosting in conjunction with the City of London.
- Burnham Beeches Eco Volunteers undertaking varied projects, beech mast – international survey on synchronicity of seed production and pollination. Vegetation Monitoring now using GPS to save position of fixed markers. Internation project on Wildlife Trees survey – identifying trees with a wildlife value that are not ancient Pollards or Beech trees.

Prior to the closure of the meeting, Chairman and Assistant Director offered their thanks prior to the retirement of Dr Helen Read for her work undertaken past and present, locally, across the City of London and Internationally.

## **A.O.B.**

**Q:** Are incidents of Dogs off lead in the on-lead area an increasing issue, do the ranger team feel there are more dog handlers/walkers on site.

**A:** Head Ranger encouraged all site users to report this issue to the Burnham Beeches Estate office, details of when and where the dog is seen walking off lead in the on-lead area is helpful as it may correlate with other information previously logged by the ranger team showing a behaviour pattern of certain site users. The 4-dog rule is one we have had for a long time and now have very few instances of this issue, though information on any user walking more than 4 dog should be logged.

## **Date of Next Meeting**

Site visit 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2025 agreed, 7-9 pm.