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Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

Registered Charity

This is one of 14 green spaces managed by the City of London at little cost to the general public.

Stoke Common Management Plan 2019 - 2028

The City of London owns and manages almost 4,500 ha of green spaces, parks and gardens in and around London as part of its commitment to sustaining a world class city.

Each Open Space is a unique resource managed for the use and enjoyment of the public and for the conservation of wildlife and historic landscape.

The City of London's vision is for it to shape outstanding environments, for its spaces to be secure, resilient and well maintained and to provide thriving and biodiverse green spaces. The City 's Open Spaces are protected under their own Acts of Parliament (Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act, 1878 and City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Act 2018) . These enable the City to acquire land for the recreation and enjoyment of the public.

The City of London is required by law to comply with certain duties relating to conservation as set out in section 28G of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981, as amended) and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). These require the City of London to take reasonable steps to further the conservation and enhancement of its Open Spaces.

Contents

West Common, July 2009

Same location, West Common, September 2017

1.0 Introduction

Stoke Common is protected under the City of London's Open Spaces Act, 1878 and the City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Act 2018. The City has a legal duty to protect and conserve Stoke Common for public recreation and wildlife conservation 'in perpetuity'.

Stoke Common contains the largest area of heathland in south Buckinghamshire. Heathland is one of the rarest habitats in the United Kingdom, created by a combination of poor, acidic soils and land management (including grazing) that keeps the vegetation open. Heathland is home to many plants and animals that are quite different from those of the grassland and woodlands with which we are more familiar.

The Common is of great value to local people who prize the open aspect and wilderness feel of the site and use it for quiet recreational activities such as walking.

This management plan builds on the achievements and lessons from the 2008-2018 management period. It is a practical working document that will guide the many hundreds of tasks that will take place on Stoke Common over the next ten years.

The plan aims to show how the City of London will be working with local people to protect and improve this important piece of countryside. It provides a brief record of what is known about the site and the issues affecting it, sets out the long term vision for the Common and describes the steps to be taken to reach this vision.

The plan has been a collaborative process between the City of London, recognised conservation experts and local communities.

We have carried out extensive consultation at various stages of the plan, with specialists, members of the Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common Consultation Group (BBCG), members of the public and regular visitors to the Common.

We have received a high level of support for all aspects of the plan, including the aims and methods outlined here.

Our thanks are extended to all those who helped to influence and produce this document. These include:

Martin Albertini, Pete Case, Penny Cullington, Steven Falk, Peter Hammond, Andy McVeigh, Jim Rose, The Epping Forest and Commons Committee, the BBCG, the staff of Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common, Friends of Stoke Common.

We would also like to thank all the volunteers who have commented as well as those members of the public who have attended consultation events and/or made comments on the plan.

> "So peaceful and quiet, love the openess, there's nothing like it around here."
>
> 2018 consultation response

2.0 Site map

Pickeridge gate

- Grid reference SU9885
- Post code SL3 6HA

3.0 Achievements during the last plan

In the last plan (2008-2018), which corresponded with the first ten years of ownership of Stoke Common by the City of London, a great deal has been achieved.

The restoration of the Common from an environment largely dominated by young, newly colonised trees to a rich and vibrant heathland is progressing well.

The major works have been completed successfully, public access facilities have been improved and the Common has become an increasingly important part of the local community.

Practical work to restore and improve habitats

- 11.02ha of young birch or pine trees mulched with machinery to restore to open habitats.
- 12.8ha of larger birch or pine trees cleared by contractors, mostly with forestry equipment, over all three areas of the Common, to restore to open habitats.
- 5ha of smaller trees and dense gorse cleared from the West Common.
- 10.19ha of young birch flailed and mown to restore to open habitats. This was due to be soil stripped but, after experiments on a small area of 0.55ha, cutting was found to be more effective.
- Approximately 2.5ha per year of scattered, mostly young trees removed from existing heathland areas by volunteers.

- Heather and other typical heathland plants are now growing well after tree clearance. No plants have been introduced and all new growth has germinated from seeds left in the soil from when the Common was heathland several decades ago.
- Grazing regime changed from approximately 25 young cattle for a fixed time to an annualised grazing system using older, more placid animals of a traditional breed (Sussex) more suited to the Common and visitors.
- Exmoor ponies grazed on the West Common to help control gorse and also on the North Common.

Community involvement, access and recreation

- Friends of Stoke Common (FoSC) group set up, carrying out practical work on the Common & promoting it at local events.
- 3690 people have worked on the Common as part of 280 individual tasks that have ranged from local Scout groups to large corporate 'away days'.
- An estimated 90,000 visits are made to the Common each year (calculated from figures obtained from gate counters).
- Paths have been improved, from small-scale patching to the major improvement of the formerly boggy bridleway beside Frame Wood.
- 2km of fencing repaired.
- Small-scale repairs and improvements to infrastructure such as gates and benches.
- Main services across the Common mapped.
- New cattle catch up areas constructed on West Common and Main Common.
- Conversion of fire break near Vine road from cut to grazed grassland.
- Improved fire plan and fire procedures (including regular drills with the Fire Service).
- Regular litter picking and removal of fly tipping.
- Regular site visits by staff, with patrol presence (4 – 5 times a week) averaging 230 visits a year.
- Annual tree safety inspections and resulting work carried out.
- Our experiences regularly discussed and good practice shared with others managing similar sites and habitats.

Monitoring and surveys to guide and improve practical work

- Inventory work carried out to find out what is found on Stoke Common, increasing our list of flowering plants, fungi, birds, beetles, bees, wasps, ants, flies, butterflies and moths. In addition the distribution of reptiles and the bog bush cricket is much better understood.
- Annual monitoring of the vegetation and the impact of the grazing to ensure that the management work is appropriate.
- Annual community-led reptile monitoring.
- Archaeological walkover survey completed.

4.0 Site description

4.1 Location

Stoke Common lies in the Parish of Stoke Poges, abutting the Parish of Fulmer. It covers 83 hectares divided into three unequal parts: the B416 separates the eastern and western sections; Stoke Common Road cuts off a small triangle to the north.

4.2 Ownership

Stoke Common was acquired by the City of London on 31st October 2007. Prior to this, it was owned by South Buckinghamshire District Council, which bought it from Stoke Poges Parish Council in 1993.

The site is freehold and is considered open land under the Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) Act (2000). In addition, the land is covered under the City of London's Open Spaces Act (1878) allowing access on foot to all areas by all persons at all times.

4.3 Site status

Stoke Common was registered as a Common in 1967 under the Commons Registration Act (1965). However, there are no commoners listed on the register: at the time of registration it was not a common but a poor's allotment owned by the Stoke Poors' Fuel Allotment Society.

Stoke Common was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1972 based on the rarity of lowland heathland in England. The reasons for notification cited both the drier and wetter heathland communities and included some notable invertebrate and reptile species associated with these areas.

4.4 Physical features

The solid geology is Reading Formation overlying chalk. On top of the Reading Formation are sands and gravels from the ancient fluvio-glacial Thames Valley gravel terraces.

Drift material accumulated during the last ice age covers the gravels. The uppermost layer has a high component of clay which is prone to waterlogging; it is often flooded during the winter and a large amount of water flows off the site, along paths and over the site boundary into a ditch adjacent to Frame Wood at the southern border.

The Common can also become very dry during the summer months and the ponds are subject to seasonal drying out.

The soils on the site are mostly acidic, with a pH between 4.5 and 6, but some soils on the western section of the common have a higher pH of 7. This is due to the application of lime to the soil in wartime when this section was ploughed and attempts were made to grow crops. However, lack of continued fertilisation has seen the soils becoming gradually more acidic with time.

There is little peat in the soil due to a number of factors for example, the drying of the site in summer does not favour peat formation. The commoners' rights to remove turf were exercised until the late 19th century and any remaining peat was subject to burning in the many fires that occurred on the site.

A hydrologist has investigated concerns that the quarrying and subsequent infill at the Pickeridge quarry (north of Stoke Common) has altered the flow of ground water and increased flooding around the North Common. The report concluded that, although there is likely to be some long term impact of the workings on raised water levels at the northern boundary of Stoke Common, there is not enough data to demonstrate the degree of impact. It also notes that there has been groundwater flooding over the last 30 years, similar to, but more frequently than, a similar site with no quarry.

4.5 Cultural information

4.5.1 Landscape

England has been divided into areas with similar landscape characteristics called National Character Areas (NCAs). Stoke Common is in the Thames Valley NCA (number 115) which, despite being urban in character, has many environmentally important areas.

Historically, Stoke Common was part of a large tract of heathland that once stretched from Iver Heath in the east to Wooburn Heath in the west and included what is now Burnham Beeches.

Original heathland tract in south Buckinghamshire, redrawn from a 1761 map by Rocque

4.5.2 Archaeology

A walkover survey carried out in 2013 found 31 individual archaeological features ranging in date from the medieval period to the 20th century. Three main types of features were found: those relating to quarrying; linear features such as banks and ditches (both of which are largely post-medieval i.e. 1600-1900); and World War II activity. Very little was found in the middle of the Common. A double trackway, flanked by two ditches and found parallel with the B416, is a possible remnant of a Roman road and warrants more investigation.

Previous finds include a bronze age axe and a small piece of Roman pottery.

4.5.3 Land use history

Although there is some discussion about the original extent of the tree cover, the site was probably cleared of trees in prehistoric times.

It is likely that crops were grown for a few seasons until nutrients in the soil were exhausted, and the area probably then underwent cycles of abandonment, grazing, succession to woodland, fires and fuel collection until the start of the nineteenth century.

This management promoted the maintenance of an open, nutrient-poor plant community, dominated by heathland plants and animals.

Only limited grazing continued after the Enclosure Act of 1810, but collection of fuel continued and may have even increased. This, plus numerous fires, was enough to stop much of the heathland becoming overgrown until the 1950s.

During the Second World War the western part of the site was requisitioned by the Agricultural Executive in order to grow potatoes; this was not very successful and by the end of the war aerial photos show cereals being grown on the site. In 1943 the War Office used the eastern part of Stoke Common for training and storage of equipment.

Above: The Black Watch on Stoke Common during World War II.
Below: Military fox holes found during the archaeologial walkover survey.

The War Office gave up their section of the Common in 1945 and the Agricultural Office, having abandoned plans for the long-term cultivation of the site, de-requisitioned their section in 1948.

After the war, Stoke Common was used mainly for recreation and only occasional fires stopped it from becoming completely overgrown.

4.6 Access and visitors

4.6.1 Visitor appeal

The main attraction to Stoke Common lies in the intrinsic appeal of a large open space. An estimated 90,000 visits are made to the Common each year, with quite high variation between the years for which there are data.

63% of visits are to the larger Main Common area. Visits are made all year round but some gates are used more in the early morning (7-9am) and evening (4-5pm) than at other times, suggesting that they are mostly used by local residents.

The gates to the two long distance paths across the Common are less well used than others, again indicating local people are more regular users. The site is easily accessed by foot, on horseback or by bike.

The nearest villages are Stoke Poges (0.75 km) and Fulmer (0.5 km). The nearest schools are Fulmer Infant School and Stoke Poges Primary School.

> "The area ... opposite the Fox and Pheasant, was originally grassland ... used for the annual fair. I only knew it as birch plants, so wonderful to see it back as open land this year."
>
> 2018 consultation response

4.6.2 Access provision

There is a bus stop next to Stoke Common on the B416, linking the site with Slough and Berkhamsted. The nearest railway stations on London lines are at Gerrards Cross (3.5 km) and Slough (5 km). There are good bus services to both stations.

The site is covered under section 15 of the CROW Act: this means it is open access because of its private Act of Parliament. Public Rights of Way (see page 46) run across all three sections, and there are bridleways on the Main and North Common.

The Beeches Way crosses the site, linking Stoke Common to the Thames near Cookham through to the Grand Union Canal at West Drayton. The Shakespeare Way, running between Stratford upon Avon and the Globe Theatre, also passes through the Common.

4.6.3 Visitor facilities

There are few facilities for visitors. Car parking is limited to a small layby off Stoke Common Road where a bridlegate also allows wheelchair and pushchair access. Public consultation revealed that 96% of respondents agreed that this limited provision of parking should be maintained to keep Stoke Common visitor use informal and local. The main paths and bridleways are well-surfaced and some are suitable for wheelchairs and prams; many paths, however, become waterlogged in autumn and winter. There are interpretation boards at the major entrances to the Main and West Commons and site information at all gateways.

4.6.4 Other estate features

A post and wire fence runs around the Main and West Commons and a gas pipeline runs across the site. There are also two water troughs and two catch-up pens for livestock.

4.7 Current use

4.7.1 Grazing

A local farmer is under contract to graze the site with cattle. The Sussex cattle used are well suited to the rough grazing of the Common. Although they are part of a breeding herd, their breeding cycle is timed so they do not have calves with them when they graze the Common.

4.7.2 Recreation

Data gathered at public consultation events indicate that use is very important for local people who are frequent visitors.

Approximately 94% of visitors to the site come from less than 5 miles away with only 8% visiting less frequently than once a week. The majority of visitors came to walk or walk dogs (74%) but others ride horses or cycle, and a few come specifically to watch wildlife.

4.7.3 Education and research

Outdoor activity groups (e.g. Scouts and Guides) use the common regularly for activities and also help with conservation work. Local schools visit occasionally and information about the Common has been supplied for school projects.

Professional conservation practitioners have made regular visits throughout the restoration period to observe and discuss the process. Local natural history groups have held meetings on the Common which also helps to increase our knowledge of the site.

4.7.4 Threats

Areas in close proximity to London are becoming increasingly built up and this brings challenges to sites like Stoke Common.

Heathland is a habitat typified by low nutrients and is therefore vulnerable to nitrogen pollution from traffic and urbanisation. The busy roads that cut across the Common not only pollute adjacent land but fragment the heathland and make it difficult for species that are less mobile to cross from one area to another.

Visitors, and especially their dogs, can disturb heathland birds causing a reduction in reproduction rates; dogs also increase levels of nitrogen through their urine and faeces.

4.8 Biological features

4.8.1 Communities and flora

4.8.1a Heathland

A mosaic of heathland covers much of the site. This lowland heathland is considered a priority habitat by Natural England i.e. a habitat identified as under threat and requiring conservation action.

Heathland is considered a semi-natural habitat. It is made up of species native to the UK and was created through many years of exploitation by people who relied upon it for their everyday needs. Without continual active management, heathland quickly reverts to poor quality woodland and over time will lose its high conservation value.

Management is therefore needed to halt the natural process of succession to woodland. This ideally is done by grazing with livestock and cutting and the combination of both maintains the best quality heathlands.

The majority of the heathland is dry heath, dominated by common heather *(Calluna vulgaris)* and dwarf gorse *(Ulex minor)*. Grasses include wavy hair-grass *(Deschampsia flexuosa)*, heath-grass *(Danthonia decumbens)*, bentgrass *(Agrostis spp.)* and matgrass *(Nardus stricta)*. Other flowering plants found include tormentil (*Potentilla erecta)*, slender St John's wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*) and heath spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*). Bell heather *(Erica cinerea)* and petty whin *(Genista anglica,* pictured below*)* are found in some places.

Common gorse *(Ulex europaeus)* dominates some areas, particularly those affected by wartime soil enrichment and fires; dwarf gorse (*Ulex minor*) is also abundant.

After a fire, burnt areas are quickly re-colonised by purple moor-grass *(Molinia caerulea)*, gorse, and the hair cap mosses *(Polytrichum commune* and *Polytrichum juniperinum)* followed by the growth of young birch trees which can then completely dominate.

Bracken *(Pteridium aquilinum)* is another species that has the potential to dominate areas and little else grows amongst bracken where it is dense.

There are also areas of wet heath. The vegetation here is characterised by purple moor-grass, cross-leaved heath *(Erica tetralix)* and creeping willow *(Salix repens)*.

4.8.1b Woodland and scrub

The margins of the site are dominated by secondary oak woodland consisting of pedunculate oak *(Quercus robur)*, silver birch *(Betula pendula*) and Scots pine *(Pinus sylvestris*). Downy birch (*Betula pubescens)* and willow *(Salix spp.)* are found where it is wetter. Other trees/shrubs include blackthorn *(Prunus spinosa)*, hawthorn *(Crataegus monogyna),* hazel *(Coryllus avellana)* and scattered alder buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*).

The ground flora in the woodland is dominated by wavy hair-grass, bracken and brambles *(Rubus fruticosus* agg*)*. Isolated glades in the woodland areas contain patches of common heather. Frame Wood to the south of Stoke Common is classified as ancient woodland: some old trees can be found on the boundary between these two areas and on the northern boundary of the North Common.

4.8.1c Open water

In 2001 the ponds on the site were improved and the number increased. There are now two large ponds and many small pools and scrapes, most of which dry up in summer; several are considered to be priority ponds, those that are the most important in the UK for nature conservation. Of the large ponds, only one retains water all year round and this supports various sedges and rushes.

Starfruit *(Damasonium alisma*), which is very rare, was introduced to Stoke Common in 2001 and some ponds are managed with this species in mind.

The ponds support several county rare or scarce species, especially in the drawdown zone at the edges; these include shoreweed (*Litorella uniflora*) and orange foxtail (*Alopecurus aequalis*).

4.8.1d Grassland

There are several small pockets of grassland. One of these is on the western side of the Common where the soil was "improved" during the Second World War. A remnant population of neutral grassland plants survives here. Among these are green-winged orchid *(Anacamptis morio)*, the tiny adder's-tongue fern *(Ophioglossum vulgatum)* and grass vetchling *(Lathyrus nissolia)*.

Clearance of trees from the North Common has resulted in a grassland community currently dominated by wavy hair-grass.

4.8.1e Valley mire

There is a valley mire next to Stoke Common Road; the fence line runs across one end of the mire. This contains bog moss *(Sphagnum spp.)*, heath rush *(Juncus squarrosus)*, bulbous rush *(Juncus bulbosus)* and sharp-flowered rush *(Juncus acutiflorus)*. Water purslane *(Lythrum portula)*, once largely restricted to this area, has now become increasingly frequent across the Common.

Starfruit, which is very rare, was introduced in 2001. It grows at the water's edge where the cattle have trampled.

4.8.2 Rare species

4.8.2a Flora

Twenty five of the plant species recorded at Stoke Common since 2000 are considered to be rare or scarce on at least a County basis; starfruit is a Red Data Book species listed in Schedule 8 (page 17).

A 2013 survey re-found several interesting species and commented on the increasing abundance of many as a result of the management work. Closely grazed 'lawn' areas (for example along the edges of tracks), edges of scrapes and temporary pools and cattle trampled trackways were all highlighted as being important places for rare species on the Common.

Dodder

Some notable finds since the last management plan include:

- Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*), seen in two locations;
- Eared willow (*Salix aurita*), near the mire;
- Bell heather, which is regenerating over large areas near the mire.

Petty whin and creeping willow have also increased significantly in abundance.

Cross-leaved heath

4.8.2b Fungi

A fungal survey carried out over the course of a year (2010-2011) found a total of 337 species. A remarkable number of these were rare, including three new species to Britain and 26 new to Buckinghamshire.

Some of the interesting species were found in association with mature trees and some more frequently associated with Scottish pine woods. One of the new species to Britain (*Inocybe lacera* var. *regularis*) was found on path edges associated with birch and willow saplings; another was a little orange cup fungus (*Aleuria congrex*).

The eastern part of the North Common, which is regularly flooded in winter, was also found to have a range of interesting species, most of which were found in water-logged leaf litter. These included the very rare *Hebeloma laetitiae*, a fungus with only two other recorded findings, both from Italy. In addition, one rare bracket fungus (*Ganoderma resinaceum*) was found on a tree.

Stands of willow elsewhere on the Common were also good for fungi.

Collection of fungi from the Common for eating is a particular problem in the autumn and although this problem has declined, some collecting still takes place. It is hoped this will continue to reduce as the area remains more open and the Rangers continue to patrol.

The orange cup fungus is found on bare ground.

Dusky cockroach

Potter wasp

4.8.2c Fauna

Invertebrates

Nine UK BAP moth and butterfly species have been recorded and an additional 6 species are considered of County importance. Highlights include small chocolate tip (*Clostera pigra*) which feeds on low growing aspen and creeping willow and silvery arches (*Polia hepatica*), the larvae of which feed on scrubby birch.

The dusky cockroach (*Ectobius lapponicus*) is a Stoke Common speciality whose abundance seems to be increasing.

Bee and parasitic wasp species found as a result of survey work include the potter wasp (*Eumenes coarctatus*) a heathland species that makes a small nest out of mud, a small wasp (*Brachygaster minuta*) that is parasitic on the eggs of the cockroach and the short-spined nomad bee (*Nomada guttulata*). This last is a cuckoo bee that attacks the red-girdled mining bee (*Andrena labiata*).

The bog bush-cricket (*Metrioptera brachyptera*) is a species known previously to occur on Stoke Common: survey work in 2009 recorded 22 individuals.

The bog-bush cricket prefers areas of relatively tall cross-leaved heath mixed with purple moor-grass.

The beetle fauna of Stoke Common was surveyed throughout 2014 and seems rather different to heathlands in the Thames Basin area; several species are found elsewhere in South Bucks but not in Surrey or Hampshire. A total of 715 species have been recorded, a good proportion of which are rare or scarce.

The larvae of this click beetle larvae only feed on decaying birch wood. The adult beetles need nectar from flowers.

Red Data Book beetle species include the click beetle *Ampedus sanguinolentus* and *Agonum sexpunctatum*, a ground beetle of wet open areas on heathland.

There seem to be especially important faunas associated with pond edges, the wet mire areas with *Sphagnum*, livestock dung, wood chip heaps and with birch and aspen trees.

A survey in 2016 recorded 19 species of fly with rarity status, including Red Data Book rare *Cephalops perspicuous* (a big-headed fly) and *Myopa extricata* (a thick-headed fly).

Clifden nonpareil moth, a formerly rare migrant first seen at Cliveden in the 18th century, is now becoming established in southern England.

The West and North Common were the two most important areas for rare species. Wet heath and dead and decaying wood had the best species assemblages; dry heath a rather shorter list. A good range of species was also found associated with livestock dung.

There are still some invertebrate groups for which recent surveys have not been carried out but there are older records for three notable spiders and one notable true bug.

The jack snipe is a winter migrant attracted by the seasonal flooding.

Birds

A breeding bird survey of the Common was carried out in 2010 and in recent years the Bucks Bird Club have contributed important information about some of the rarer birds on the site.

Particularly noteworthy birds recorded in the last 10 years include several listed in schedule 1 (see box) including the Dartford warbler *(Sylvia undata)*, woodlark (*Lullula arborea*), crossbill (*Loxia curvirostrata*) and hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), some of which have bred on the Common in recent years. Other notable species are skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), nightjar *(Caprimulgus europaeus)*, stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*), and lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*).

Many of these bird species require good quality heathland. Features that are particularly important for them include: maintaining areas of dense mature heather and dense mature gorse, ensuring sufficient areas of open bare ground and keeping disturbance during the breeding season at a minimum.

Studies of heathland birds have shown their sensitivity to recreational disturbance, especially to dogs running off leads. Although Stoke Common receives far fewer visitors than Burnham Beeches, its small size and close proximity to houses means that disturbance of birds by people and dogs can be a problem.

Mammals

There has been no small mammal survey of the Common but common species like muntjac deer and foxes have been recorded. Bats have been seen flying over and feeding, especially using the larger ponds.

Herptiles

Nine species of native herptile are breeding on the Common, five of which are UK BAP species and listed on Schedule 5 (see box). These include adder *(Vipera berus),* grass snake *(Natrix natrix),* common lizard *(Zootoca vivipara),* slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) and great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*). Survey work by volunteers over the last ten years has greatly increased our knowledge of the reptiles on the Common.

Many different designations can be given to plants and animals to identify their importance locally, nationally and internationally.

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP): a nationwide scheme of plans aiming to reverse the decline of certain threatened species. BAPs resulted from the 1992 biodiversity summit in Rio and ran initially until 2012.

The scheme was succeeded by the **UK post-2010 Biodiversity Framework**. Each country in the UK has a strategy; in England this is **Biodiversity 2020**. This strategy takes a larger scale approach as advocated by the UK National Ecosystem Assessment and 'Making Space for Nature', a report chaired by Sir John Lawton. Although some regions and species groups continue to use the BAP system, this is not mandatory.

European protection is given to birds listed on the **EC Birds Directive** and plants and animals listed by the **EU Habitats Directive**.

National Red Data Book: a list of species that, in the opinion of experts, fulfil international criteria for being rare, threatened or vulnerable in the UK.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, amended) gives certain species legal protection: **Schedule 1** lists those where it is against the law to disturb their nests or young; **Schedule 5** lists those where it against the law to kill or injure these species, disturb their places used for shelter or protection or to disturb the animals whilst they are using these places; **Schedule 8** lists plants protected by law.

Each County has a Local Environmental Records Centre that stores and analyses biological data gathered and sent in by natural history groups, professional ecologists and members of the public. These data are shared nationally. Two of the classifications used by the Centres are: **nationally notable** (found in 15 or fewer hectads, with one hectad being 10 km^2) and **County scarce/rare/extinct** (considered to be threatened, rare or extinct within Buckinghamshire).

A full species list and more information about the plants, fungi or animals of Stoke Common is available from the Burnham Beeches office.

5.0 Vision

Stoke Common, conserved and protected "in perpetuity", will become a high quality, sustainable public open space and a site of national conservation importance.

The objectives, targets, actions and projects detailed on pages 20-45 will create the landscape shown opposite. It will have the following qualities:

Stoke Common will be a flagship site for heathland.

- The site will meet Natural England's favourable condition status by meeting the conservation objectives for SSSI status.
- Rare and notable species of birds, insects, reptiles, plants, fungi etc. will thrive here.
- The historical features, such as remnants of World War II activity and older quarries, will be maintained and protected, including any newly discovered features.

The majority of the site will be open heath, with mature trees dotted across it.

- The heather will be a mixture of different ages, height and density.
- The heathland will be a mosaic of different elements, including a variety of plants, some areas of bare ground and some scrub. Some places will stay wet all year round.
- The West Common, North Common and Main Common will each have their own individual characters.
- The West Common will feel more contained, with heathy glades and sheltered sun traps.
- The site will be grazed by a traditional breed of cattle, supporting the local farming economy.
- Parts of the Common will be grazed by Exmoor ponies.

The local community takes pride in the Common.

- Local residents will use the Common for quiet recreational pursuits such as walking, running, walking the dog, picnics or riding; few visitors will come by car.
- Walkers, cyclists and horse riders will use clearly defined, well-maintained paths.
- Volunteers will carry out much of the site management, including regular tasks.
- Fundraising will create extra revenue for important works.

Other habitats will be managed to add to the diversity of the Common.

- Mixed deciduous woodland will grow around the edges of the Common, partly shielding the heathland from the roads.
- Woodland edges leading on to the heath will be gradual and sinuous.
- Small areas of scrubby birch/willow will be left within the heathland.
- Gorse clumps will consist of a mixture of ages.
- There will be areas of open water (some of which will dry out in summer), providing an additional habitat for rare plant species.
- Hoof prints from cattle will create varied conditions around the edges of some of the ponds, adding to the diversity of the Common.
- The valley mire will thrive, supporting *Sphagnum* and other wetland plants.

The combination of habitat and good management will make the Common attractive for educational use.

- The habitats on Stoke Common will be a focal point in the wider landscape.
- The three separate parts of the Common will be connected so that it feels like a single site.
- Where possible, the land adjacent to the Common will be managed in a way that is good for wildlife and supports the Common's habitats.
- The Common will be a functioning part of the Biodiversity Opportunity Area within South Buckinghamshire.

Opposite: artist's impression of Stoke Common, 2028

6.0 Objectives and Methodology

6.1 Objectives

The works to be carried out on Stoke Common all contribute towards meeting the following objectives. The targets and actions will be monitored and, if necessary, adjusted.

Objective 1: Biological

To continue to restore and maintain the heathland and associated habitats to favourable condition as part of a landscape-scale network.

Objective 2: People

To support and facilitate low-key public access at a level that is compatible with the conservation features of the reserve and to encourage local community involvement in the management of the Common.

Objective 3: Estate assets and legal issues

To protect the Common, to fulfil all legal obligations and to maintain estate structures in good condition.

> "Fantastic to have a SSSI on our doorstep. So peaceful and beautiful at all times of the year."
>
> 2018 consultation response

6.2 Objective 1: Biological

The City of London aims to continue to restore and maintain the heathland and associated habitats to favourable condition as part of a landscape-scale network.

Habitats and species are interdependent and cannot be managed in isolation. In general, the stronger the site is in terms of habitat vigour and diversity, the more resilient it will be to the impact of outside influences such as climate change, pollution and habitat loss in surrounding areas.

As a SSSI, Stoke Common is assessed regularly to determine its condition. Although heathland is not the most diverse habitat in terms of the number of species found, it is important that conditions are right for the typical species to thrive.

Substantial restoration has taken place in the last 10 years. At the time the City of London took over, the reserve was, as an SSSI, considered to be in unfavourable condition. Now a 2017 assessment by Natural England notes that the habitat restoration work has resulted in substantial improvements.

The assessment stated that although good quality heathland areas (with a mix of heather, dwarf gorse and purple moor grass) were now present, these were not yet covering a large enough area and that there needed to be better links between the good patches of heathland.

It was acknowledged that the improvements were largely due to the recent management work and that in all likelihood full restoration could be achieved in the future.

The City of London's first management plan (2008-2018) addressed the large scale works required to remove much of the young scrubby woodland and begin the restoration of the heathland.

The next ten years, covered by this plan, will see the completion of the initial phase and the beginning of a transition to smaller scale works, with the aim of producing and maintaining a mosaic of habitats at various different scales. Stoke Common is not just heather-dominated communities: grassland, trees, woodland, mire and ponds are an integral part of the nature reserve. Young trees and areas of scrub will always be found on the Common, although the future management will ensure that these do not dominate the reserve as they have done in the recent past.

6.2.1 Management priorities 2019-2028

The main focus of the next 10 years will be to transition from restoration to on-going management, primarily through grazing (section 6.2.5) and the targeted interventions detailed in the following sections. While this management will largely concentrate on managing habitats, it will also be necessary to consider the needs of individual species.

6.2.2 Heathland

The most important habitat at Stoke Common is the heathland. The reason for the Common's designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest is largely because of the dwarf shrub heath habitat. The small-scale variation within the heathland is a critical part of creating a varied structure over a nature reserve that is generally flat in profile. The City's ongoing management aims to maintain this variability into the future, as well as adding to it through, in particular, heather managment that builds on the achievements of the previous ten year plan.

6.2.2a Heathland restoration 2008-2018

Tree felling and scrub removal have changed the Common, creating an open landscape with scattered trees and a protective woodland fringe. The impact of the tree removal, through felling and use of mulching machines, left a ground surface devoid of vegetation and varying between exposed gravelly mineral soil and areas of chopped leaf litter.

The woody material left after felling has largely been raked into habitat piles: this allows light to reach the soil in the cleared areas and facilitates seed germination. Small areas of mulch have been left to create a varied substrate: this increases the variety of plant life growing in the cleared areas.

The growth of plants on these recently cleared areas has generally been strong and quick. The exact mix of species of plant has depended on factors such as the method used, soil surface structure, viable seeds in the exposed soil, amount of woody material left and soil moisture levels.

The 2008-2018 plan anticipated a trial of soil scraping as an additional tool to remove young, dense scrub. However, repeated cutting of low-growing birch areas by flail and mower has created a grass-dominated sward that is developing interesting species such as petty whin. Given the problems of disposing of the soil and moss that would have resulted from soil scraping, it was decided not to pursue this option.

Volunteers have been invaluable in restoring heather to some areas of the Common by removing young birch scrub by hand, notably along the track sides and around the mature pines towards the eastern end of the Main Common. This caused minimal damage to the plant communities developing underneath. Contractors carried out similar hand clearance where the young trees were larger e.g. near the pond by the road and on North Common.

The majority of trees felled were removed but when work was done by hand, log habitat piles were created.

Most of the log piles are large and 'snake-like in the way they meander, creating a variety of aspects suitable for reptiles and invertebrates. Some piles have had soil or wood chips added.

6.2.2.b Heathland vegetation structure

Heather has a recognised life cycle. Pioneer heather vegetation is found in places where the trees have recently been cleared. It is mature in those parts of the Common that have had heather growing for the last ten years. Although it is helpful to have heather at these different stages in different places it is far better to have them mixed up so that, in a 10m square for example, all stages are represented.

Heather has a recognised life cycle where the bushes pass from pioneer phase to building or mature and then start to degenerate, falling apart so that new plants can grow in the centre of the old bushes when they die.

Complete carpets or monocultures of heather are less good for wildlife than a mix of different species of plant with different structures. The interest on a heathland site such as Stoke Common is not the broad expanse of even-aged heather but the variability created by the many features within the reserve.

Micro-habitats include: bare ground/scrapes; boggy, muddy and puddled areas; deadwood; brambles; individual trees; grass grazed to different heights; scrub; and even cow pats!

Ideally Stoke Common will have heather of different ages mixed with flatter areas of grass, hummocks of purple moor-grass, tufts of sedges, shallow seasonal pools, wetter patches, drier patches, scrambling plants such as brambles crawling through others, and prickly bushes such as gorse.

This will provide small-scale sun traps, cooler places, open areas for basking, safe refuges for hiding, plant structures for building webs, perching points for birds, decaying wood and accumulations of leaf litter.

There will inevitably be parts of the Common where some plants are more common than others, but small-scale and larger-scale variability will be found throughout the Common.

Obtaining this mosaic requires active management. The grazing animals (section 6.2.5) are the most important drivers to integrate the different elements. They also add their own components to the system: dung, hoof prints and trampled areas around the ponds and along trackways all provide habitats for additional rare and scarce species.

However, the grazing livestock cannot achieve this entirely by themselves. In the past, heathlands were heavily influenced by people who cut the bracken for animal bedding, the gorse and peat for fuel, and birch for small scale wood and besom brooms.

Mowing random short strips through the heather will help create and maintain a structural mosaic.

People no longer need these products and so we need to either mimic some of these activities (e.g. cut scrub by hand) or find new uses for the products in order to maintain the heathland in ideal condition for the wildlife that depends on it.

In addition, some mechanical cutting of the heather and gorse will be needed.

One option is to do this in specific pre-planned blocks but in order to contribute to the overall mosaic pattern that we are aiming for on Stoke Common the preferred method is to cut random strips and small patches across the Common.

Some cutting of heather and gorse, for example, will be done each year within each of the compartments of the Common, targeted at the places where these plants dominate. This will also encourage the grazing animals to reach places that might otherwise become inaccessible to them.

Another option for achieving the mosaic pattern is small-scale controlled burning; this may be trialled to see if it is safe and possible.

Our vision for the vegetation of Stoke Common is for:

a) variation on a large scale, with each block having its own 'flavour' in terms of the dominant species of plant.

b) variation on a small scale with a mix of plant heights, bare ground and scattered trees and scrub. This small-scale variation will be extremely dynamic, changing from year to year as the livestock graze heavily or lightly in specific places and the plants are cut in random strips.

Target: heathland structure to be composed of 10-40% pioneer phase, 20-80% building/mature, less than 30% degenerate and less than 10% dead.

Achieved by: targeted cutting and grazing.

6.2.2c Mosaic composition

The mosaic of different plant species and micro habitats should not be uniform across the whole area. Different parts of the Common should have, for example, a heathy feel, a grassy feel, or be more gorse- or scrub-dominated. Vegetation height should also vary, with some closely cropped areas as well as patches of taller vegetation.

We will use the experience gathered over the last 10 years to 'tweak' the plant communities growing on parts of the Common. Scraping down to different soil levels, turf cutting, mowing, grazing and subtly altering moisture levels by creating depressions and rises are all possibilities.

In most areas the plants that have grown following restoration work are suitable but in a few areas it may become necessary to try to break up large patches of dominant plants using mechanical methods or targeted grazing. This might be necessary, for example, if the moss *Polytrichum* or soft rush remain dominant; areas currently dominated by soft rush could be cleared to create conditions for birds such as woodlark.

Bracken is a native species and is desirable on the Common. However, in drier areas it has the potential to form a dense canopy which shades heather and other plants: if this occurs, whipping or spraying will be used to control the bracken.

Common gorse is a valuable component of heathland. The bushes provide important cover and perching points for birds; the structure provides good attachments for spider's webs; older plants are homes for rare species of fungi and good for birds.

However, gorse that has formed large, dense impenetrable blocks will shade out other species. Grazing animals, especially the ponies, help keep the gorse in check but rotational cutting is also required to maintain the desired continually changing mosaic of different ages and sizes.

Where the gorse has grown back strongly, more robust methods may need to be used to stop it from dominating. Some blocks will be retained as permanent 'old growth' stands where the stems should be allowed to reach 3cm or more in diameter.

Birch scrub still needs to be controlled but must not be eliminated: several rare species found on the Common rely on birch, even in the scrubby phase of growth. A few trees of a variety of species will be left to grow on as mature trees (see p 27).

Maintaining birch without letting it grow into mature trees will continue to be achieved using the 4', 6' and 8' local 'rules': volunteers and staff working in specific areas remove trees of the pre-determined height and leave those that are smaller. Weed wiping may be an option in areas where very dense young birch is re-emerging. Scrub is also valuable in more open areas of the Common as a wind break.

Grazing by domestic livestock is integral to the maintenance of the heathland communities. This is covered in more detail in section 6.2.5.

Target: gorse will be limited to a maximum of 20% ground cover on the western side of the Common. It will be managed to ensure it is varied in height and composition and that no more than 10% is of the same age.

Achieved by: rotational cutting and grazing; larger scale cutting and/or use of herbicides if required.

Target: scrub will be less than 10%. It will be varied in structure with no more than 25% of the same age.

Achieved by: cutting sections using the 4', 6' and 8' rules each year (i.e. all trees over the designated height to be cut, smaller ones left).

Target: 80% of the open areas should be referable to National Vegetation Classification type H2 (*Calluna vulgaris-Ulex minor* heath) or similar.

Achieved by: mapping/measuring at regular intervals.

Target: heathland composition of heathland areas to be as follows:

- 2-10% bare ground;
- At least two species of dwarf ericoid shrubs present (heather, cross-leaved heath or bell heather) and covering 25-90%.
- Gorse cover not to exceed 30% across the whole Common; 90% of this to be in dense compact stands of less than 0.5ha;
- At least one species of desirable grass (i.e. typical heathland species such as purple moor grass, wavy hair grass, or mat grass) to be present amongst the heather but not to exceed 25% cover;
- At least 2 species of "desirable" plants other than grass or heather to be present within heather stands;
- Bracken not to exceed 10%;
- Trees and shrubs not to exceed 15%, as trees/tree seedlings;
- Mosses and lichens to make up at least 10% cover;
- Less than 1% of the habitat to be heavily eroded, burnt or otherwise damaged;
- No non-native species (for example rhododendron) to be present.

6.2.2d Other heathland components

Grassland

Acid grassland can be an important part of heathland systems, adding to the overall diversity. In some places tree clearance will result in a plant community dominated by grasses rather than heather. At Stoke Common this is particularly true of the North Common where we know that in the past it was possible to play football on an open area opposite the Fox and Pheasant pub. Following tree removal here, wavy hair-grass is dominating the sward. This area is likely to become more diverse and less grass-dominated following grazing.

The area on the western section of the Common which was improved by liming during the war contains many neutral grassland species. This area is gradually returning to its acid heath precursor and will be left to do so: no soil improvers will be added.

Some of the restored areas on the Main Common also have a more grass-dominated feel, particularly alongside the main paths and where mowing and flailing has been done. These managed strips contain species often considered to be 'weeds' such as thistles, ragwort, sorrel and bramble; these are valuable for invertebrates alongside more typical heathland species like broom and creeping willow.

The grass-dominated areas will be managed in the same way as the rest of the open heathland, by grazing (and occasional mowing if needed) to keep, for example, blocks of gorse in check. Bracken control and small scrapes may also be necessary.

Tree clearance

The main blocks of woodland identified for removal in the 2008-2018 plan have all been felled. It is proposed to fell a further 2ha to:

- complete the restoration of the overall heathland habitat;
- widen the firebreaks;
- make bridleways more accessible.

In addition, 1ha of trees will be thinned (although the area will still retain more trees than on the rest of the Common) to create an area where dappled sunlight reaches the ground. This will create a more diverse ground flora than that found at present. These areas are shown on the map on p40.

Target: increase heathland area by a further 2ha (to result in a total of 57ha of heathland).

Achieved by: as detailed above.

Retention of individual trees

Mature trees within the heathland are a valuable habitat for many species and individual trees will continue to be selected and retained. The large-scale restoration work of 2008-2018 kept many individual trees, although in some areas of dense, single-species scrub, there were no suitable trees to leave.

Species selected for retention include oak, pine, alder buckthorn, willow and some birch. These are good for wildlife and provide perching points for birds. Scots pine, although technically no longer native to southern England, is appropriate because it was part of the landscape over 400 years ago. On the West Common, the tree and shrub species left include hawthorn and apple.

Some trees have since fallen after being exposed to new wind patterns after clearance. In these areas, new trees will be identified and marked for retention and the fallen trees left to provide additional decaying wood that will increase habitat diversity.

Target: between 5-10 trees per hectare in the open areas, either single or in clumps. These will be broadleaved trees, such as oak, willow, rowan, birch and hawthorn or Scots pine. It may be necessary to identify young trees to grow on for the future.

Achieved by: identification and retention.

6.2.3 Woodland and scrub

Woodland provides an additional three-dimensional structure and microhabitats for wildlife and is home to a variety of species typical of Stoke Common. Woodland consisting of native species will be retained in the east of the main area, around the electricity substation and on the southern part of the West Common. This will be left to allow natural processes to take place including the retention of deadwood which is a valuable habitat, particularly for invertebrate species.

In addition, a woodland fringe will be left around most of the site as a barrier against noise, pollution and visual disturbance from the surrounding roads. This will also to help protect neighbouring properties in case of fire.

Some unusual saproxylic species of invertebrates have been found at Stoke Common. Many of these need decaying wood for their larvae and flowering shrubs for the adults so they can obtain pollen and nectar before breeding.

The level of decaying wood on the Common is currently quite high because of tree felling during the restoration phase. In the short term the deadwood will be replenished by the small amount of planned tree felling; in the long term it could be more challenging to maintain a consistent supply. Options to be considered include a) allowing more trees to grow on the fringes of the Common and in the more open areas so that they can felled at a later date to create deadwood and b) pollarding some existing trees in order to create a decaying wood habitat in living trees.

The woodland at the eastern end of the Main Common is predominantly young and clearance would probably result in the restoration of more heathland. However, woodland is also valuable as outlined above. Clearance along the bridlepath and the removal of some trees to create glades, rides and some more open woodland is desirable. This will improve ground conditions for access and create sunny glades for wildlife while retaining tree cover.

Pollarding some of the willow will make sure they do not shade the vegetation underneath too much.

The wetter wooded areas of the Common have their own character. The seasonally flooded oak woodland on the east side of the North Common is home to rare species of fungi and this area will be left to develop naturally. In several places, associated with the fringing woodland round the edge of the common, there are stands of willow and aspen. These species are extremely important for invertebrates and it is important to ensure that some are retained both as mature trees and, in the case of aspen, as suckers. Some willows should be regularly pollarded to retain trees without causing too much long-term shade.

Some of the most interesting individual trees on Stoke Common are the old oak and beech on the boundary bank. It is highly likely that some of the saproxylic species (those invertebrates associated with dead and decaying wood) recorded on the Common are reliant on these trees.

Target: woodland areas retained in perpetuity will be managed so that natural processes continue; decaying wood will be left in the woodland and as habitat piles; plans will be made to ensure a continuous supply of decaying wood for the future.

Achieved by: leaving naturally occurring decaying wood and creating some habitat piles when work carried out; heap earth over some habitat piles; leave more trees than necessary in some areas to allow for felling in >20 years' time for the creation of decaying wood; creation of standing dead trees where appropriate.

Target and action: pollard approximately 25 willows and cut a few each year, on a roughly 10 year rotation; trial pollarding of some aspen trees and perhaps hawthorn if any suitable.

Tree felling can leave sharp edges between retained woodland and open habitats. A softer edge with graduating heights of bushes and a sinuous shape to the edge is much better for wildlife and attractive. 'Nibbling' at some of the woodland edges will be carried out to achieve this without encroaching on the open heathland or the fire breaks at Vine Road and Windmill Hill. The edges will need an ongoing programme of rotational cutting to keep this profile because the trees and scrub will be constantly growing.

Target: all edges between woodland and open areas to have a graded profile which will be maintained through rotational cutting.

Achieved by: widening if necessary and maintaining by cutting.

The edge between the woodland fringe and the heathland will be gradual and not sharp.

The firebreak at Vine Road (above) will have scalloped edges that will be cut at intervals.

The North Common (right) will be maintained as open and grazed.

Target: firebreaks at Vine Road and Windmill Hill to be wider and with scrubby edges and graded profile

Achieved by: widening and establishing a rotational cutting regime; a quarter of the Vine Road woodland margin to be cut every other year; ensure woodland fringe is retained to the north but cut halos around selected flowering trees like hawthorn and apple to ensure they get enough light to thrive.

6.2.3 Open water and temporary pools

The ponds and pools of Stoke Common support a wide variety of rare plants and animals and are an extremely important part of the nature reserve. Their use as drinking water for the cattle is very important: disturbance at the water edges by the cows, coupled with seasonally fluctuating water levels, means that many different plants thrive here, including some very rare ones. Freshly scraped ground is needed for some of the early colonising plants and it will require regular disturbance to create this. More pools should be made and then a 3-5 year rotation developed for scraping the soil in them. However, the shallow edges of the ponds have a disadvantage because it is easy for dogs to access the ponds too. Dogs are much less desirable than cows because they churn up the water, making it very murky. They can also add chemicals to the water from veterinary products such as flea powders and skin treatments.

Ponds with a more wooded aspect, like the Lozenge pond, and those with emergent plants growing out of the water are valuable for a different range of species such as dragonflies. Dappled shade is generally more desirable than dense shade around a pond.

> "Really like the 'soft' edges bit, so it doesn't look too extreme."
>
> 2018 consultation response

Seeds of the extremely rare starfruit were introduced to two ponds in 2001 as part of a formal introduction plan which included reintroducing the plant to other ponds in South Bucks. Plants were seen erratically after 2001and the last sightings were 2007 in Jeremy Pond and 2008 in Penny Pond. A Fresh Water Habitats Trust (FHT) project funded by the Heritage Lottery found no seed in cores taken from the ponds in 2017. FHT have carried out some small-scale re-profiling of the banks and further introduction of plants is planned.

Target: ponds and temporary pools to have at least 50% of their margins free from overhanging trees/scrub.

Achieved by: cutting and clearing woody vegetation by hand where needed.

Target: 15% of pond margins to be suitable for rare plant communities and invertebrates that thrive in the 'drawdown zone'.

Achieved by: grazing – the cattle will trample the pond margins as they come to drink.

Target: species in ponds and temporary pools to be 100% native.

Achieved by: removing non-native species such as New Zealand pygmy weed (*Crassula helmsii*) by spraying or other methods.

Target: fences to be used on a temporary basis each year as required to deter dogs from specific ponds.

Achieved by: erecting fences in winter and removing in summer (Penny and/or Jeremy Ponds).

Target: Create ten more pools or deeper scrapes across the Common of varying sizes and with shallow margins; use the archaeological survey to avoid areas of historic interest and plant surveys to avoid rare plants.

Achieved by: pools created.

Target: assist FHT with on-going monitoring of starfruit.

Achieved by: volunteers and FHT checking ponds each year.

Target: produce plan for disturbing the surface substrate in the pools/scrapes to mimic past management events (like driving through with a horse and cart) and carry out each year; aim to disturb both the same areas each time and new ones depending on the outcome.

Achieved by: volunteer task.

6.2.4 Valley mire

Restoration of the valley mire through tree felling has not proved as successful as hoped and, while there are rare plants in this area, the amount of *Sphagnum* is not as high as anticipated. Options to improve water retention include a) blocking water flow and b) felling more trees; however, those remaining are largely aspen and are valuable for invertebrates.

Target: at least 50% cover of *Sphagnum*.

Achieved by: experiment with using felled birch trees to stem the water flow. Consider grazing with ponies to target the soft rush and removing more trees from the north side of the valley mire if the other actions do not improve the abundance of desirable species. Note that some mire species are found in other parts of the Common where it is wet.

6.2.5 Grazing

As a heathland site, Stoke Common has been grazed by a variety of animals over its long history.

Grazing is essential to maintain the open aspect of the site, its character and form, keep scrub under control and to maintain the desired small-scale mosaic structure of habitats and vegetation. It is financially-viable, environmentally-friendly and a method of management that produces a better and more natural result than using solely mechanical methods of control such as cutting and mowing.

The site is grazed primarily by Sussex cattle at present. Unlike modern breeds, this traditional native beef breed thrives on the poor-quality forage of the Common and eats the coarse vegetation.

The herd includes older cattle that are familiar with the reserve and can show the younger cattle how and where to browse. Older herds (minimum 2 years old) without calves also tend to be relatively calm and uninquisitive; they are well-suited to places where the public walk. These types of cattle and the current farming system are also a commercially viable option for the grazier.

> "Beautiful and full of nature."
>
> 2018 consultation response

Exmoor ponies have been used on the western side of the Common for controlling gorse, especially in the winter, and on the North Common to diversify the grassy sward.

The North Common is the only large area of the Common that is not permanently fenced; electric fencing has been used here to contain the ponies. Invisible fencing may be an option for this area following the successful trial of this method at sister-site Burnham Beeches NNR.

The livestock dung supports good communities of decomposer beetles and flies. These break the dung down and return the nutrients to the site. The livestock are not treated with chemical intestinal worming products while they are on site because these products can cause developmental problems for invertebrates found in the dung.

Action: grazing heathland, grassland, scrub and gorse to achieve variation of sward structure (see heathland targets, p25) without letting grazing tolerant species dominate the sward.

Achieved by: flexibility over the number and type of animals put out and the number of days they graze each year, dependent on weather conditions and the condition of the site.

Target: to graze the Common for between 2,600 and 4,000 animal days each year; 100% of grazing animals to be native, traditional, appropriate stock, probably mainly cows and ponies.

Achieved by: contracting a local grazier to provide the animals and look after them; animals from Burnham Beeches may be used to supplement this.

6.2.6 Protocol for carrying out work on Stoke Common

All major mechanical work such as tree-felling will be carried out between September and the end of February, with the following exceptions:

- bracken control will be carried out in July/August after a check of the area for late ground nesting birds;
- any weed wiping will be done in June when it is most effective; care will be taken to avoid ground nesting birds; weed wiping will be done on hot days to minimize risk to reptiles (i.e. when they can move away quickly).

If appropriate, surveys should be carried out for woodlark, Dartford warbler, reptiles and amphibians before works commence.

All blocks of trees will be surveyed for bat roosts before clearance works, as will any trees cut for safety reasons, following the protocols developed for Burnham Beeches.

Surveys for reptile hibernation and egg sites will be carried out where clearance and the deposition of vegetation/soil is planned the year before works are undertaken. This will prevent disturbance or damage during works.

Any work within 250m of the Pickeridge Pond, Lozenge Pond and Jeremy Pond will have a risk assessment carried out because of the presence of great crested newts (as determined by eDNA in 2016); the use of big machines and stump grinding will also not be carried out close to ponds for this reason.

6.2.7 Monitoring & survey work

Although much has been learnt in the last ten years, more information about the flora and fauna of Stoke Common will always help us manage it better.

Monitoring during the restoration process to inform the ongoing management has included:

- Simple vegetation monitoring;
- Assessment of the impact of grazing on invertebrates and plants;
- Assessment by Natural England of targets set by them as part of the conservation objectives;
- Recording sightings of species such as bog bush cricket, beautiful brocade moth and heathland birds;
- Checking the extent of problem species such as gorse and bracken and adapting the work programme accordingly;

- Counting the number of days grazing;
- Providing information for volunteers and members of the public to help us check key species.

Target: key rare or threatened species and vegetation communities to be monitored regularly.

Achieved by:

- number of grazing days recorded each year;
- annual grazing impact assessment carried out;
- current vegetation monitoring to be reviewed and revised and a new plan produced;
- facilitating the checking of targets and overall condition by Natural England;
- encouraging the recording of species by local and national recorders, groups and, where appropriate, students;
- regular review/mapping of potential problem species such as gorse or bracken; production of a control plan if needed;
- check ponds for rare plants such as starfruit (ideally annually) with assistance from Freshwater Habitats Trust for 2019-21;
- great crested newt survey of ponds every 5-10 years.

Action: where possible facilitate or commission reviews of bog bush-cricket (check distribution every 10 years) and other rare or threatened species/ species groups, depending on the availability of specialists or volunteers to carry this out.

Achieved by: survey work.

Action: commission inventories of species groups not covered in the previous plan, such as spiders, grasshoppers, true bugs and lichens.

Achieved by: commission inventories when resources allow.

Action: identify plant communities in terms of National Vegetation Classification.

Achieved by: carry out National Vegetation Classification after all major restoration works have been completed.

6.2.8 Connecting Stoke Common to the wider landscape

Historically Stoke Common was just one of a string of heathy commons interspersed between areas of woodland in South Buckinghamshire.

Today, this connectivity has been broken by development such as roads and houses. It is ever more difficult for many species of plants and animals to move through the landscape; they are confined to increasingly small areas and struggle to maintain viable populations.

Restoring connections between the three elements of Stoke Common, buffering it by positive management of adjacent areas and getting better connections between patches of similar habitat such as Black Park and Burnham Beeches are all desirable.

This is an aspiration of the South Bucks Biodiversity Opportunity Area and relies on the enthusiasm and commitment of neighbouring landowners and local people. It is difficult to set targets for this element of work as at least some will be opportunistic.

It would also be helpful to know more about the wildlife (particularly invertebrates) of some of the remaining heathland fragments in South Buckinghamshire to help put Stoke Common in context. This could be started by looking for some specific target species, such as the colourful beetle *Agonum sexpunctatum*.

Actions:

- obtain protection for the trees on the banks surrounding the Common;
- work to ensure positive management of adjoining land;
- consider options for getting better linkage between the three areas of the Common;
- explore options to increase the knowledge of the wildlife on other similar but smaller habitats within South Bucks.

Achieved by: working with neighbouring land owners, Local District Council, County Council and Highways authority.

6.3 Objective 2: People

The City of London aims to support and facilitate low-key public access at a level that is compatible with the conservation features of the reserve and to encourage local community involvement in the management of Stoke Common.

6.3.1 Access and Recreation

The majority of people using Stoke Common at present are local residents. Using gate counters it has been estimated that around 90,000 visits are made each year. Generally, public use is low key, informal and in keeping with the site.

Although the majority of visitors to Stoke Common are likely to remain locals, the site is of course open to those who live further afield. Whilst this relatively small site cannot support large number of visitors, the Common is an important part of the City of London's network of green spaces accessible to the people of London.

Being the most significant area of heathland in South Buckinghamshire it does also attract those with interests in nature such as bird watching or botany.

It is important to ensure that existing facilities (paths, layby and benches) are in a good condition so that visitors can continue to explore and enjoy the site.

Information and interpretation must be provided to ensure that existing and potential visitors are aware of the value of Stoke Common and the management work being carried out. It should also help visitors to understand the impact of their actions when visiting. Dogs potentially present problems for ground nesting birds if not under effective control and annual information campaigns will be needed to inform visitors of the need to encourage dogs to be on leads at key times of the year.

Target: to measure the usage of the site at 10-year intervals and use gate counters to monitor change in the intervening periods. The information will be used to guide access strategies.

Achieved by: ensuring functional counters on gates, downloading data regularly and commissioning work to analyse the information and give an estimation of visitor numbers.

Target: 90% of visitors satisfied with the experience of their visit.

Measured by: a questionnaire every ten years if no other public consultation is held.

Target: at least two low-key events to be held on the Common (for example guided walks) per year.

Achieved by: organisation and promotion of events via the Burnham Beeches events programme.

Target: up-to-date, relevant on-site information.

Achieved by: replacement and maintenance of information boards as needed; monthly update information/ bulletins posted at gateways.

Target: up-to-date and relevant information available to a wider audience.

Achieved by: monthly information bulletins on the City of London website; social media etc.

Target: improve the understanding of site users and other local people regarding the Common and the species that are found there.

Achieved by: holding at least one event, competition or campaign every five years to help raise the profile of Stoke Common locally, with the aim of fostering greater understanding of its conservation value and the importance of active management.

Target: All dogs to be under effective control, as a minimum during the bird breeding season.

Achieved by: information campaign and patrolling each year; if this is not effective then more formal methods to be investigated.

Due to the wet nature of the Common in the winter, regular repairs are necessary to prevent visitors damaging areas next to paths by seeking dry routes. All "desire lines" need to be monitored and discouraged in case of damage to habitats, and alternative routes may be suggested at certain times of year to take account of ground-nesting birds.

Ensuring Rights of Way are clearly visible helps visitors find their way around the Common. Surfacing or mowing the routes and ensuring heathland restoration respects paths has avoided the need for lots of markers but they may still be required in some places.

Some of the feature benches require replacement. These were installed after a school design project some years before the City of London took ownership. All worn benches will be replaced and new ones added if required but these are likely to be simple designs in the future.

Target:

- routes of all Public Rights of Way (ROW) and major paths to be well maintained and wide and high enough for walkers (and cyclists and horse riders on bridleways).
- ensure that non-bridleways are clearly marked to avoid use by horse riders using way markers or 'no horses' signs where and when necessary.
- immediate edges (2-5m) of paths will be cleared of trees and kept as low vegetation to create a fire break and maintain access for fire engines and water bowsers; a higher scrub border may be encouraged to grow beyond this.
- all surfaces will be maintained to a good standard and, where possible, will be of locally sourced gravel.

Achieved by: survey and practical remedial and improvement works in partnership with Buckinghamshire County Council and the Chilterns Society.

"Activities with FoSC volunteer group have been such fun, and a great way for our family to spend time together."

2018 consultation response

6.3.2 Community involvement

The site is valued by local residents and the Friends of Stoke Common Group is active and self-sustaining.

Volunteers, both Friends and others, have achieved an amazing amount of work in the last ten years and will continue to have a key role in the management of the Common in the future. Rotational scrub cutting will be necessary for the foreseeable future to keep a mixture of different sized trees. Other tasks, such as path repairs, species surveys, hydrology monitoring and bench repairs provide variety for regular volunteers.

Target: to hold at least 20 practical volunteer tasks per year.

Achieved by: FoSC, Stoke Common and Burnham Beeches volunteers.

Public consultation for the management plan indicated a high level of support for proposed actions in this plan, with a small number of respondents querying the need for particular management works. Particular care will need to be taken to explain the rationale behind these aspects of the 2019-2028 plan to alleviate concerns.

In addition, local residents and users need to be kept aware of work planned or in progress and of issues affecting the site.

Action: to inform residents and users of forthcoming management activities and create opportunities for dialogue regarding the work.

Achieved by: using signs on site to inform about habitat work prior to its start; contact neighbours in advance of any work that has the potential to be particularly noticeable from their property; use of social media and local publications.

Action: to create opportunities for the public to meet staff and learn about the site.

Achieved by: regular site visits by staff; articles in e-newsletters and website; local press and publications such as the Parish magazine; on-site bulletins.

6.3.3 Education and promotion

Stoke Common is occasionally used for visits from educational establishments and is used regularly by Cubs and Scouts. It will never become a major venue because of the lack of facilities but encouragement of use by local groups will help local communities appreciate the reserve's value and sensitivities. Higher level research projects should be encouraged when appropriate in order to increase knowledge about the site.

The Common can also be used as a demonstration site for heathland management. Local wildlife groups and specialists should also be encouraged to perform surveys on the site. This adds to our knowledge and will help long term management.

Action: to encourage school and youth groups to use Stoke Common.

Achieved by: building links with local schools and youth groups.

Action: promotion of the site to specialist interest groups.

Achieved by: facilitating meetings and visits by specialists and specialist organisations.

Action: promotion of the value of Stoke Common to interested parties.

Achieved by: ensuring management, issues and events are covered in City of London Committee reports and appropriate publications of other statutory bodies.

6.4 Objective 3: Estate assets and legal issues

The City of London aims to protect the Common, to fulfil all legal obligations and to maintain estate structures in good condition.

6.4.1 Historic features

The 2013 archaeological walk-over survey identified many historic features on the Common. In general, there is no conflict between potential historic features and management of the site. However, the report should be referred to when planning works such as pool/scrape creation to ensure sensitive areas are avoided.

The quarry next to the fire break on the eastern margin of the Main Common would benefit from removal of trees to protect its edges. If resources could be found, it would be interesting to explore the possible Roman road with a view to small-scale excavation.

Target: remove trees from at least part of the quarry.

Achieved by: contractors or a mixture of staff and volunteers.

Target: explore opportunities for carrying out archaeological excavation of the possible Roman road.

Achieved by: investigating further if financial support is obtained.

6.4.2 Tree safety

Tree safety is a legal obligation and all inspections, and any subsequent work identified, must be carried out within a required time span. Work will also be undertaken to reduce long-term tree safety risks by the removal of some trees on road edges and management as scrub instead.

Target: to ensure that all tree safety surveys and subsequent work is completed on time.

Achieved by: tree safety will be recorded and carried out to the City of London standard.

6.4.3 Fencing and gates

Regular maintenance of infrastructure such as fencing, gates, water troughs, catch-up areas etc. is required to keep livestock enclosed and healthy. All gates should be safe and appropriate for use. All the bridle gates were replaced with an improved design during the last plan but regular checking is required to ensure that they function smoothly and do not shut too quickly.

Action: secure the fence line.

Achieved by: regular fence inspection during and at the end of the grazing season; running repairs to existing fence line while grazing; major repairs at the end of the season; mowing round the fence line to ensure it is accessible on the inside.

Action: ensure all access points are appropriately gated and gates are fit for purpose.

Achieved by: carry out regular inspections of gates, repair or replace as necessary; adjust bridle gates when necessary to ensure ease of use by horse riders.

"It is now in a much better condition than previously."

2018 consultation response

6.4.4 Fire

Fire presents a very real risk at Stoke Common, both to the wildlife and adjoining properties. The last major fire was in 1995, destroying over 50 acres of vegetation.

Target: no significant fires on the Common.

Achieved by: regular liaison with local fire services; maintenance of and widening firebreaks near houses and along major Rights of Way on the Main Common; improved access to water in case of fire; access to allow fire service vehicles to leave public roads; on-site information about the danger of fires; regular drills; all staff and relevant personnel to be kept up to date on plans and drills.

6.4.5 Staff presence

A regular staff presence offers both reassurance and a point of contact for visitors. This presence can help ensure that problems and issues such as the dumping of garden refuse, fungus collection and any misuse of the site are dealt with promptly.

Whilst 72% of respondents to the public consultation felt that the level of ranger patrols over the last 10 years was about right, some 20% considered it too low. Where other commitments allow, the aim is to increase this slightly, particularly at key times of the year such as the autumn.

Stoke Common is not currently protected by byelaws and opinion at the public consultation was mixed regarding their value. There are no plans currently to invest resources in setting up byelaws but the option remains should they be deemed necessary for example, in the fungi-picking and/or bird-nesting seasons.

Target: to ensure at least three staff visits per week and at key times; to respond to emergencies within 30 minutes. To boost staff presence at times when required, for example in the fungi-picking season.

Achieved by: Burnham Beeches staff patrols.

6.4.6 Illegal access

Action: to minimise illegal encroachment.

Achieved by: ensuring boundaries are secure; clear contact details; a timely and effective response to incidents; regular litter picking.

6.4.7 Finance and income

The City's own resources and the endowment provided with the land will meet only part of the site's projected annual running cost: additional grant funding is required and this will be sought where appropriate.

A Countryside Stewardship grant will help fund the remaining small areas of tree felling and provide some crucial annual income for the 10 years of this plan.

Action: to meet the annual income targets for project delivery (see Action Plans, pages 41-45*)*.

Achieved by: identifying and applying for appropriate grant aid (City of London); encouraging fundraising and donations (City of London and FoSC); fulfil the obligations of the Countryside Stewardship grant and apply for subsequent equivalent grants.

6.4.8 Gas pipeline and other utilities

Maintenance or replacement of underlying pipework will need careful management to minimise damage to the Common.

Action: to ensure that the gas pipeline is maintained to the correct standard.

Achieved by: liaison with relevant utility companies.

6.4.9 Geology/hydrology

The hydrology of the site has been studied in the past because of gravel extraction and subsequent infill at the land to the north of and adjoining the Common (see section 4.4). Collation of regular measurements of the water table from dipwell points by a hydrologist enables a watch to be kept on any changes.

Action: no significant avoidable changes to the hydrological regime.

Achieved by: regular measurements of dip wells by volunteers and data sent to the hydrologist for comment; taking expert advice if and when necessary.

"Pleased to see it being looked after."

2018 consultation response

6.4.10 Other legal obligations

The legal status given by SSSI designation means that Natural England needs to give permission for work carried out on the Common. This will be done by obtaining consent for the management plan and applying for consent for any additional actions.

Action: to ensure all legal requirements are fulfilled.

Achieved by: meeting with Natural England and applying for consent when appropriate; meeting the local police and other relevant authorities.

6.4.11 Being mindful of the impact of our activities

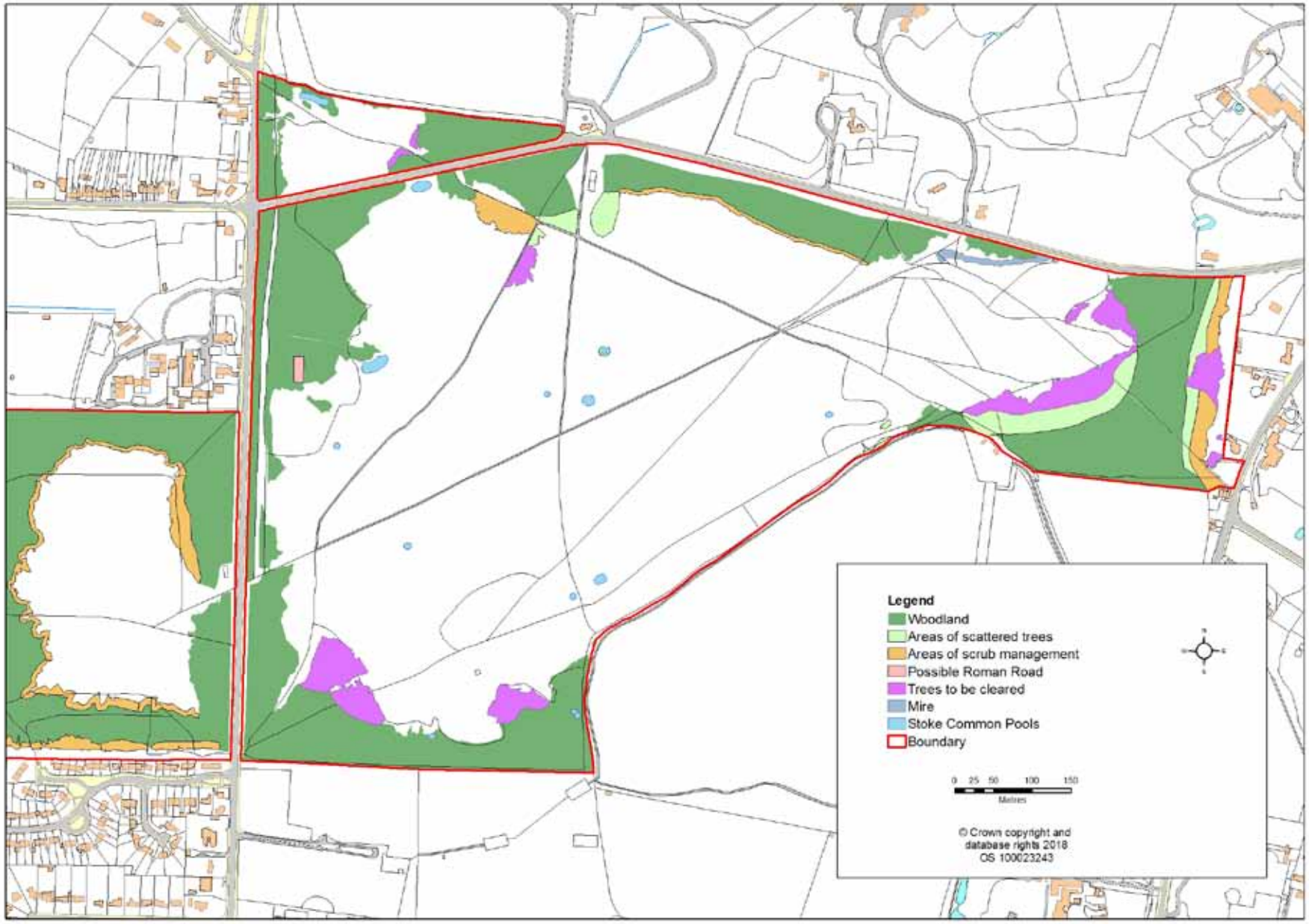
The aim of this plan is to manage Stoke Common for its conservation and historic interest as well as for the enjoyment of visitors, but these actions also have the potential to cause negative impacts.

A biosecurity protocol has been drawn up which is adhered to by contractors working on the Common to reduce the chances of invasive species and diseases from being introduced.

A Sustainable Fleet and Plant Management Plan has been drawn up to help reduce environmental impacts while providing the minimum amount of machinery required to deliver the services described in this management plan in a safe and effective manner.

7.0 A ten year work plan

7.1 Map showing habitat works required



7.2 Ten year work plan to achieve Objectives 1, 2 and 3

The work described in this management plan is ordered in a 10-year programme that guides the annual work programmes. Each numbererd row in the table below is associated with a detailed work plan that includes project specifications and indicators of success.

The annual work programmes then detail the precise work to be done, timing, implementation and responsibilities.

These detailed work planning documents are used to guide work carried out by staff and are essential for the successful management of Stoke Common.

Key to ten year work programme ■ Active in this year ☐ Will be carried out if appropriate and/or if funding allows

	Project										
	OBJECTIVE 1: Conservation										
	Heathland restoration	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.1	Tree clearance	■									
1.2	Mulching - new areas	■	■								
1.3	Mulching - follow up work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.4	Identify isolated trees during annual work to leave for the future	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Heathland maintenance	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.5	Cyclical cutting / burning heather	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.6	Bracken control - spray or whip	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Gorse	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.7	Cyclical cutting	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Scrub	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.8	Birch / pine control by hand	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.9	Scrub cyclical cutting by machine	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.10	Weed wiping as required	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Objective 1 continued										
1.11	Creation of graduated edges to woodland areas	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.12	Rotational cutting of scrub on fire break, Vine Road	■		■		■		■		■	
1.13	Rotational cutting of scrub on firebreak, Windmill Hill		■		■		■		■		■
1.14	Creation of small-scale scrapes	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.15	Larger scale / frequent cutting / mulching of soft rush	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.16	Spread seed from heather cutting over less diverse areas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.17	Removal non-native species (map every 3 years)	■	■	☐	☐	■	☐	☐	■	☐	☐
1.18	Pollard willow etc	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Grazing	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.19	Tender new10 year contract with grazier for cattle and start	■	■								
1.20	Annual agreement with grazier	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.21	Pony grazing	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.22	Install invisible fencing on North Common			■	■	■					
	Woodland	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.23	Thin trees to create open wood pasture edges	■	■	■							
1.24	Create habitat piles	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Open water / temporary pools	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.25	Clear scrub from pond margins as required	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.26	Remove *Crassula hemsii* from pond by spraying	■	■	■	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.27	Seasonal fence for starfruit	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.28	Creation of 5 - 10 more pools		■		■		■				
1.29	Rotational disturbance of pools / scrapes	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Valley mire	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.30	Remove trees			☐	☐						
1.31	Vallley mire - options for slowing water flow	■	■						☐	☐	
	Monitoring and survey	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.32	Heathland vegetation composition	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

	Objective 1 continued										
1.33	Grazing impact assessment	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.34	Pond edge flora and starfruit - annual survey	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.35	Newts			■					■		■
1.36	Reptiles - general survey	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.37	Bog bush cricket - extent	■	■								■
1.38	Inventory of spiders, Orthoptera, true bugs, lichens etc	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
1.39	NVC survey			■	■	■					
1.40	Biological recording	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.41	Regular monitoring of species	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
1.42	Review / mapping of problem species	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
	Connecting Stoke Common to the wider landscape	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
1.43	Explore options for protecting boundary bank trees (e.g. TPO)					■	■	■	■	■	■
1.44	Work with neighbours - good management adjoining land					■	■	■	■	■	■
1.45	Explore options for linking all three parts of Stoke Common					■	■	■	■	■	■
	OBJECTIVE 2: encourage low key public access and use	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
2.1	Estimate numbers of visitors				■						
2.2	Maintain and download data from gate counters	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.3	Customer satisfaction questionnaire					□					■
2.4	Organise events and guided walks	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.5	Organise larger event, campaign or competition			■					■		
2.6	Maintain information boards at main entrances	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.7	Provide up-to-date information	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.8	Provide information about grazing	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.9	Provide information about habitat works before starting	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.10	Provide signs to indicate 'no fungi picking'	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.11	Promote good dog control	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.12	Maintain RoW accessible and with clear 'corridor'	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

	Objective 2 continued										
2.13	Provide and maintain signs to indicate 'no horses'	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.14	Maintain open path edges as fire breaks - mowing / cutting	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.15	Prevent establishment of desire lines	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.16	Support FoSC event programming	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.17	Support FoSC by helping with monthly events	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.18	Support FoSC in other ways	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.19	Encourage use of Common by specialists / for projects	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.20	Encourage volunteer input	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.21	Provide and inspect benches	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.22	Ensure parking space in good condition	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.23	Discourage unsafe parking at informal pull-ins	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
2.24	Provide education information pack		■	■							
2.25	Assist educational visits	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2.26	Promote Stoke Common to CoL members and officers	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	OBJECTIVE 3: Fulfil all legal obligations and maintain estate structures										
	Historical aspects	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.1	Investigate possible Roman road	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.2	Removal of trees from part of quarry	■	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Tree safety	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.3	Carry out regular tree safety inspections and required work	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.4	Inspect all trees for bats before felling as per BB bat policy	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.5	Clear round roads to obtain scrub not trees		☐		☐	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Grazing infrastructure	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.6	Maintain all gates, corrals and water troughs	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.7	Monthly inspections / repairs when livestock grazing on site	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.8	Mow track adjacent to fence line and keep clear	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.9	Repairs to fencing as required	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Objective 3 continued										
	Fires	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.10	Maintain fire breaks and gate access	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.11	Liaise regularly with the Fire Service	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.12	Maintain fire plan and carry out drills	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Maintain physical presence	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.13	Regular staff patrols - minimum 3 x week	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.14	Deal with misuse	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.15	Remove litter	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.16	Byelaws - explore options				□	□	□	□	□		
	Illegal access	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.17	Inspect boundaries and deal with any encroachment	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Financial needs	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.18	Apply for grants to enable works to be carried out	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.19	Fulfil obligations of Countryside Stewardship grant	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.20	Apply for agri-environment grant										■
3.21	Encourage FoSC / local people to assist with funding	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Gas pipeline and utilities	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.22	Ensure gas pipeline and other utlilities maintained to suitable standard	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.23	Monitor hydrology dipwells	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Other legal obligations	**Y1**	**Y2**	**Y3**	**Y4**	**Y5**	**Y6**	**Y7**	**Y8**	**Y9**	**Y10**
3.25	Liaise with Natural England	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.25	Liaise with police	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.26	Liaise with key stakeholders	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3.27	Produce new management plan										■

Key to ten year work programme ■ Active in this year □ Will be carried out if appropriate and/or if funding allows

Glossary

Ancient woodland: woodland that has existed since at least 1600 AD.

Heathland: an area of vegetation characterised by heathers, on impoverished soils, that is the result of thousands of years of exploitation by humans.

Herptiles: reptiles and amphibians.

In favourable condition: a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) meeting with Natural England conservation objectives.

Mire: a wetland area with peaty soils.

Scrub: area dominated by small trees and woody bushes.

Secondary woodland: woodland that has grown up on previously open land such as heathland or farmland.

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): designation giving legal protection in order to conserve the best of the UK's wildlife and geological heritage.

Silvery arches is a declining moth species whose larvae feed on scrubby birch trees.

Rights of Access

The City of London's Open Spaces Act (1878) allows access on foot to all areas of the City's Open Spaces, by all persons at all times.

Public Rights of Way (PROW) are legally defined routes across countryside that allow access by certain types of user. The user has a right to use the path, but not any adjoining land. As legal highways PROW are the responsibility of the local authority. Often these paths are waymarked with coloured arrows that show their status.

Footpaths may only be used by people on foot (or in a wheelchair or pushchair). Bridleways may be used by people on foot, bicycle or horseback.

In addition, in 2000 the Countryside Rights of Way Act granted open access to specific areas of countryside to people on foot; access is subject to certain restrictions such as keeping their dog on a lead during nesting seasons. These areas are all shown on up to date Ordnance Survey maps. Open access does not apply to cyclists or horse riders. For more information, visit www.gov.uk/right-of-way-open-access-land.

A common is an area of land registered as a common under the 1968 Commons Registration Act. A common has an owner but is often used by other people who have common rights, for example, to graze animals or cut wood. There are, however, no commoners for Stoke Common.

The Stoke Common Management Plan has been ratified by Natural England. The plan was drawn up by Helen Read and Martin Hartup; editing and design by Feste design & interpretation services; illustrations by Dan Powell; photographs by Andy Barnard, Chris Morris, Helen Read, Jamie Smith, Jeremy Young, John Walters, Dave Wilton and other members of the Burnham Beeches' team.

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Stoke Common is a precious remnant of the once extensive heathland habitats that extended right across South Buckinghamshire. The glorious riot of purple and yellow flowering heather and gorse in late summer makes it a special place to visit, as well as being home to some extremely rare and threatened species.

The City of London Corporation is committed to managing the Common 'in perpetuity' to ensure that it remains a precious place for generations to come.

If you would like more information about Stoke Common or have any comments on the works proposed on the Common, please contact the Burnham Beeches office, details overleaf.

CITY OF LONDON

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