

GREEN SANDS COMMON PROJECT UPDATE - 2020 to March 2021

Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee - 16 March 2021

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer, Finance & Trading

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report updates the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee about the Green Sands Common Project.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Making Sevenoaks District to be a place where people can enjoy clean and high quality urban and rural environments.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Margot McArthur

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Recommendation to Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee: To note the update report.

Reason for recommendation: This is an information and update report and requires no further actions

Introduction

- 1 The Sevenoaks Greensand Commons Project started in the autumn of 2018 and ends on the 30 June 2022. Half of the projects lifetime to date has been within the coronavirus pandemic. The restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus have impacted on the project over the last year, however we continue to deliver on elements of the project whenever and wherever possible.
- 2 We are currently in discussion with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to see how this effects the overall project and how we can go forward, hopefully with a small extension to the project.

Conservation

- 3 At the start of 2020 staff, apprentices and volunteers were able to build on the works undertaken by contractors at Bitchet Common to restore and enhance areas of nationally scarce lowland heath and wood pasture at Bitchet Common. This included the removal of invasive rhododendron, cherry laurel, birch, and bracken encroachment over 5.5ha of land. These areas of heathland are now in a position from which they can be recovered and restored. This area has again been surveyed for flora.
- 4 Birch and other invasive species have been removed on volunteer task days at Crockhamhill and a viable area for heathland restoration is emerging at the site.
- 5 Further work to remove encroaching blackthorn to protect the acid grassland has taken place at Farley Common. Additionally, a lot of sycamore saplings have been removed from the oak/bluebell woodland to the east of the site with local volunteers.
- 6 Rhododendron, cherry laurel clearance has taken place at Sevenoaks Common.

Access

- 7 Access audits have been undertaken on the 8 project sites. Some further works have taken place at Bitchet Common to open up access. At Fawke Common an access route has been re-routed to protect an area of mosses and lichens.
- 8 We have carried out improvements to sightlines on footpaths and rides at Sevenoaks Common. Staff and volunteers did a sterling job achieving this just before the Covid-19 restrictions came into force.

Landscape & Social Heritage

- 9 The project has supported undertaking Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) surveys, which give an enhanced '3D' aerial photography of the landscape. Old field boundaries, hillforts, bomb craters or other hidden sites are revealed using LiDAR.
- 10 These LiDAR images are now available to view by registering at <https://kentlidar.org.uk/> there are lots of guides on the Portal to help with the recognition of features and information on how to record features.
- 11 Three 'Archaeology of the Commons' Drop-In Sessions were delivered before the coronavirus restrictions were introduced. These provided an opportunity for the public to learn more about the Sevenoaks Commons project and specifically the heritage actions planned. 49 Adults and 5 children attended.

- 12 During lockdown online engagement LiDAR work has been taking place with volunteers, including training. A number of volunteers have explored the LiDAR maps and reported landscape features of potential interest.
- 13 During a break between the second and third lockdown community archaeologist led socially distanced walk over surveys took place at Bitchet Common to identify and explore historical landscape features discovered through the desktop LiDAR research.

Schools Programme and Activities for Target Audiences: Young and Excluded People

- 14 Physical contact, including schools, forest schools and work with older audiences such as dementia cafes etc. has been paused due to coronavirus restrictions. However, the following ‘contactless community engagement’ has taken place
- Lockdown Activity Packs made up and supplied:
 - Forget me not café - 20 packs,
 - West Kent Mind Adult group - 20 packs,
 - West Kent Mind Families - 20 packs,
 - General public - 15 packs, School packs
 - 25 activity packs, with electronic copies also provided, other packs distributed via councils and partners - 85 packs.

Heritage Interpretation

- 15 We continue to give talks to promote the project, both in person and now virtual. Our apprentices have produced over a dozen wildlife newsletters covering moths, reptiles, nightjars etc. This has been distributed to 40 volunteers involved with practical conservation work and have been well received. We have also produced an update on the project using mail chimp.
- 16 The newsletters mentioned above were also then distributed as downloadable links on this email update distributed to over 300 project contacts.

Staffing

- 17 There have been some staff changes over the year, however a .4 FTE People Engagement Officer and a .8 FTE Project Officer will be starting in March and April 2021 respectively.
- 18 Our two apprentices are both on track to successfully complete their City and Guilds Level 2 Countryside Worker qualifications (their submission date

for C & G is 15th March 2021, just after their SGC Apprentice contract end date of the 1st March 2021).

Works planned for 2021

- 19 The following work programmes will be commenced in 2021.
- Producing site management plans.
 - Running well planned, socially distanced practical conservation and access volunteering opportunities, and small-scale activities subject to government restrictions being eased.
 - Continuing and increasing our ‘contactless community engagement’.
 - Updating the project web pages.
 - Designing site interpretation for the project sites.
 - Further landscape archaeology projects.

Key Implications

Financial

There are no service delivery projects that contain financial implications within this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

No legal implications have been identified in this report.

Equality Assessment

No decisions are being made within this report, so there is low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Conclusions

Despite the challenges of Covid-19 and the national lockdowns this funded project has continued wherever it is possible in full cooperation and participation with the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Adrian Rowbotham

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Finance & Trading