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| Report to | Mousehold Heath Conservators 15 March 2019 | Item |
| Report of | Head of citywide services | 7 |
| Subject | Mousehold Heath quarterly management update | |

Purpose

To provide a quarterly update on activities on and relating to Mousehold Heath which contribute to the delivery of the management plan objectives.

Recommendation

To note the content of the report.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority a safe, clean and low carbon city.

Financial implications

Any financial implications arising from this report will have or will be met from approved budgetary provision.

Ward/s: Catton Grove, Crome and Sewell Wards

Contact officer

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| Simon Meek, parks and open spaces manager | 01603 212403 |
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Background documents

None

Report

Background

1. The report details the work, activities and issues arising on, and relating to, Mousehold Heath.

Management

2. Work was completed on the draft full management plan and also the draft public summary plan. The documents went out for two weeks consultation via the council's website.
3. 35 people responded to the consultation, no details were recorded to avoid General Data Protection Regulations, it is known that Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service did respond.
4. Following the consultation which was largely supportive, minor amends were made and the final draft produced for approval at the next Mousehold Conservators meeting.

Infrastructure management

5. A new bench, sponsored by the Mousehold Heath Defenders, was installed in Oak Avenue, by a Mousehold warden and a volunteer from the Defenders.
6. A bench on St James Hill has been repaired by the wardens.
7. Britannia Road and the Pitch and Putt public car parks had regrading works carried out to repair damage caused through erosion and to repair pot holes.

Tree safety

8. Through observations made during patrols and following ad hoc reports from members of the community, the wardens have undertaken a range of tree work across the site, to unblock paths and make 9 mainly wind-blown trees and branches safe. There are still low risk trees which require further remedial work. These works will be prioritised and completed so as not to disturb hibernating insects and nesting birds.

Management for nature

9. A range of habitat and site management tasks have been carried out by the wardens, volunteers and contractors, to help deliver the management plan objectives relating to habitats. These are detailed in relevant sections in the report.

Woodland management

10. Work to restore a section of woodland adjacent to Gilman Road by clearing dead and overgrown vegetation has continued. This work has been carried out to increase

community access to a formally impenetrable area, with the aim of improving biodiversity and creating a more diverse environment for fauna and flora to become established.

11. Encroaching bracken and scrub has been cut back in other woodland glades to allow a diversity of plants to grow and flower.

Heathland and Grassland management

12. The autumn/winter months are one of the busiest times on the heath, with practical tasks focusing on path maintenance and cutting back encroaching vegetation; and clearing scrub, which rapidly out-competes and smothers important heathland and grassland plant species.
13. Large areas of old and leggy gorse that had encroached over footpaths, (especially adjacent to the Vinegar Pond) and also onto heather covered areas, has been cut back and fire breaks created. This work will help to improve the biodiversity of the site and also reduce the risk of large fires.
14. Encroaching scrub has also been cut back and removed to conserve heathland and grassland habitats.
15. Large, previously burnt areas (almost one hectare) have been humus stripped, to create bare ground to assist with the regeneration of heather in these areas, fulfilling the requirements set out in the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Agreement. This work will also help reduce fire size and risk.
16. The acid grassland at the Anthills area has been cut with a brushcutter and the arisings removed, to reduce nutrient status and benefit specialist acid grassland plants.
17. A volunteer has undertaken a Tree popper trial, using the tool to pull invasive birch saplings. Sapling regrowth will be counted over the next few months to see how effective the tool has been, to inform a decision on future use.
18. A Natural England Officer undertook a site visit with the Mousehold wardens, to monitor the progress of the Mousehold Heath HLS Agreement 2012 – 2022. He was pleased with the progress of the project to date, especially the success of the humus stripping, and suggested that the heath could be eligible for another similar Environmental Stewardship agreement in 2022.

Path maintenance.

19. Gilman Road cycle route/footpath was flailed to open up access and control overhanging vegetation.
20. Eight footpaths which have been encroached upon by vegetation, such as those behind the Vinegar Pond, have been cut back by the Mousehold wardens, with the help of individual volunteers and volunteer groups, to maintain access to the site.

21. Work has also continued on maintaining the Cavalry Track by cutting back encroaching vegetation and clearing debris from the adjacent gullies.

Litter management

22. A number of areas formerly used for camping have been cleared and rubbish removed by the wardens. Assistance was provided by the Norwich Norse Environmental litter picker, as part of his daily work.

Misuse and antisocial behaviour

23. Five separate campers have been found on the heath. The wardens verbally advised them about camping on the heath being against the bylaws and they were advised to leave. If they claimed to be homeless, the Norwich City Council single homeless and rough sleeper coordinator was contacted so that she could make contact with the persons.

24. A number of groups and individual mountain bike cyclists building BMX jumps have been spoken to by the Mousehold wardens seen during patrols and whilst working on the heath.

25. In all but one incident the individuals listened to the advice, acknowledged what they were asked to do and left. On one occasion two people refused to acknowledge that they understood what they were being asked to do and the reasons why, and then rode off.

26. If people did remain and continue the activity the police would be contacted and asked to speak to the participants and deal with the incident.

27. A number of BMX jumps have been taken down and the hollows filled in by the Mousehold wardens with help from a Norwich City College Duke of Edinburgh student group.

Volunteers

28. A total of 738 volunteer work hours have been undertaken on site in the last quarter by the following groups:

- The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)
- The Assist Trust
- Mousehold Heath Defenders
- Mousehold Heath Mousketeers
- City College Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) Scheme group
- East Coast College group
- George White School students
- Norwich High School for Girls
- Many volunteers from the community

29. Ongoing support provided by the volunteer groups has provided an opportunity for the community to become involved with the management of the heath, to increase their understanding of the projects being undertaken, the importance of the heath and to engender a sense of ownership and pride in the space.

Events

30. A range of events to increase understanding, involvement and enjoyment of the site have been organised or hosted on the heath in the last quarter:

- A bird identification and ecology walk took place in December, and 18 species of bird were seen. 8 people attended the walk.
- Forest schools run one session a week (depending on the weather) with approximately 15-20 pupils on each one.
- The Mousehold wardens have led 6 guided walks for East Coast College students with seven students attending each walk.
- Norwich School cross country running event starting and finishing at Gilman Road Open Space.