

Report to Mousehold Heath Conservators
21 June 2019
Report of Parks and open spaces manager
Subject Mousehold Heath quarterly management update

Item

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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 great neighbourhoods, housing and environment.

Financial implications

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

Ward/s: Catton Grove and Crome

Contact officer

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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.

Infrastructure management

2. Two vandalised benches were removed and new benches installed by the Mousehold wardens and a City College DofE group, in line with the management plan objectives project specification ME02 01. One is adjacent to the Vinegar Pond and the other on the Desert wildflower area.
3. A bench sponsored by the Mousehold Heath Defenders, was installed at the top of Oak Avenue by a Warden and a member of the Defenders.
4. A vandalised bench along the Nature Trail leading down to the Long Valley has been repaired and re installed by the wardens.
5. Three bollards which had been pulled out of the ground adjacent to Britannia Road Car Park have been reinstalled by a Warden assisted by a TCV volunteer.

Tree safety

6. The second six monthly tree safety survey was completed by the Wardens, identifying fourteen trees in need of works carried out for public health and safety across the site.
7. Eight windblown, dead, dying and/or dangerous trees and branches have been made safe and removed by the Wardens with the help of volunteers.

Management for nature

8. 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

9. Work to maintain access to 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.
10. Encroaching bracken and scrub has been cut back from paths in other woodland glades.

Heathland and Grassland management

11. The Spring months are always the quietest time for practical conservation tasks, allowing birds to nest without disturbance and vegetation to bloom. The emphasis

switches to recording and monitoring biodiversity, which helps to assess current and guide future management;

- Monthly plant surveys have been carried out by the Mousehold Heath Defenders in the Mustard Pond Glade and on St James Hill. Both surveys recorded a record number of species this April!
- Two, Weekly Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (BMS) transect surveys have taken place on the Eastern and Western side of the heath.
- A monthly Bumblebee Conservation Trust transect survey has been undertaken by a Warden and member of the Mousehold Defenders.
- Eight of the ten Common Bird Census (CBC) transect surveys have been completed by a Warden with the help of volunteers, including a Dawn Chorus Walk survey on 06.05.19., to mark International Dawn Chorus Day.

12. In short sward open areas, the tree poppers have been used to pull up birch saplings which rapidly out-compete heather and grassland species. Other practical tasks focusing on path maintenance

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. Work has continued to cut back encroaching vegetation on paths and maintaining the Cavalry Track by cutting back encroaching vegetation and clearing debris from the adjacent gullies.

16. The Earth Heritage Trail Interest Points have been maintained by a joint Geological Society of London and Norwich work party, led by the Mousehold wardens on 01.06.19.

Litter management

17. Two areas used for camping have been cleared and rubbish removed by the wardens. Assistance was provided by the NorwichNorse Environmental litter picker, as part of his daily work.

18. The Mousehold Heath Mousketeers volunteer group cleared large amounts of rubbish from the Beech Drive area during a litter pick.

19. Due to our resident litter picker taking leave a problem occurred regarding his cover, over a four week period only two weeks of his position were covered, the rest of the

time volunteer help was called upon to keep the heath clean, only the litter bins were emptied within the two week period of no cover, some were overlooked and overflowing.

20. The regular litter picker was on leave and the cover was off work ill.
21. The matter has been raised at the contract managers' meeting by the parks and open spaces manager and the matter has now been resolved. NorwichNorse Environmental have been asked to provide weekly rota details to the wardens along with contact numbers. Another member of staff has also been trained to provide cover.
22. There may be occasions when illness results in a reduced service but Norwich Norse have been asked to notify the wardens of any issues in advance and to agree priority locations if there is a minimal service being delivered.
23. A minimal service should only occur in exceptional circumstances.

Misuse and antisocial behaviour

24. Due to an increase in public usage over the School holiday period, a number of groups and individuals riding mountain bikes and building jumps have been spoken to by the Wardens whilst on patrols and whilst working on the heath.

All individuals listened to the advice given and moved on, with all jumps levelled and filled.

25. Two campers, who were not homeless were moved on - one sleeping in a car at Hill Farm track was helped regarding re homing through our Single Homeless - Rough Sleeper coordinator.
26. On Monday, 22 April, around 07:00 hrs, a body was found by a member of the public, adjacent to the Wingfield Open Space, this situation was swiftly dealt with by the police and the body removed from site by midmorning. There were no suspicious circumstances

Volunteers

27. A total of 627 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
 - NatWest Bank Corporate Group
 - George White School students
 - Norwich High School for Girls
 - Many volunteers from the community

28. 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

29. 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:

- Forest schools from Mousehold Avenue run one session a week (depending on the weather) with approximately 15-20 pupils on each one.
- Partnership working between Zaks, the children's charity EACH and the Mousehold wardens resulted in an Easter Egg Hunt on Good Friday, attended by over 25 people.
- Eight environmental education activities have taken place organised through our events team and run by Roots to encourage children and adults to reconnect with the natural world through play and outdoor experiences. The activities undertaken include, birthday parties (including woodland adventure), stay and play sessions, adult fitness and wellbeing and children's clubs, spoon carving and yoga.
- The first moth evening was held on 17th April, with five people in attendance. It was a very cold night for the time of year. A total of 12 moths were recorded including 2 new species for the site. The second survey evening was on 30th May, recording 18 species and 2 new for the site, bringing the total of species recorded on Mousehold Heath, in the last 11 years, up to 255. Six people attended the event.
- The first of our Community Wildlife Workshops took place on Thursday 11th April, covering an introduction to moths, led by a local expert and Mousehold Heath Warden. Five people attended the event, viewing a number of moth, butterfly and other wildlife species.
- On Bank Holiday Monday 6 May, a Dawn Chorus Survey Walk, which included a Common Bird Census (CBC) survey, was led by a Mousehold Heath warden. Three members of the community joined the walk at 4.15am, on the chilly morning, to mark International Dawn Chorus Day – a celebration of nature. A number of notable bird's species were recorded, including Common Buzzard, Green and Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Creeper and Chiffchaff.