**Common and Woodlands Annual Review 2020-2021**

The Parish Council owns Chesham Bois Common and a portion of Bois Wood and it also looks after a further portion of Bois Wood and Tenterden Spinney on long leases from The Woodland Trust.

Our 10-Year Management Plan for the sustainable management of these areas was agreed by the Forestry Commission and Chiltern District Council in March 2019, but work in 2020 has been considerably affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. The replanting of new trees in Tenterden Spinney was delayed until December 2020 and could not be the community event originally planned; however, approximately 150 young trees, all native broad-leaved trees, have now been planted. The area of Bois Wood near the burial ground was in poor condition so 130 trees were felled in Autumn 2019. The licence from the FC specifies the density and species mix for replanting with emphasis on resilience and native broad-leaved trees from the Chilterns and over 450 saplings were planted in December 2020 and March 2021, a mixture of small-leaved lime, silver birch, wild cherry, hornbeam, field maple, oak and sycamore. In the long term this increase in diversity and a younger age structure will result in a healthier woodland which will be able to support an increase in biodiversity.

The Year 2 work on the Management Plan intended to focus on thinning trees on the main Common; however, the evidence of ash dieback in quite a significant number of trees necessitated more intervention and 53 trees were felled in Autumn 2020. The majority were ash with dieback close to roads or the main bridle path through the common, including 3 very large ash trees close to the war memorial that could get brittle and drop branches. Replacement trees have been planted in some key areas, for example, three new oak trees behind the war memorial. The Council also undertakes a yearly safety survey of trees adjacent to roads, footpaths or buildings and throughout the year clears up any fallen trees or branches.

The Council is concerned to enhance the amenity value of the Common and during the year installed a trail of balancing logs in Tenterden Spinney for children to play on. This appears to have been well received and may be a forerunner for similar provision on the main common in years to come. Similarly, the Council has agreed in principle to allow Heatherton School to develop an outdoor education area on the common to the west side of the main road. This will be available for any school or youth groups to use, no fences will be erected and open access to the public will be maintained at all times. The Council has also agreed to install a bund along Chestnut Lane to prevent the encroachment of cars onto the common; expenditure has been approved but a section 38 application to the Planning Inspectorate for permission will be necessary first.

The pond on the common is a great community asset but it has suffered from low water levels this year and appears to have a leak. Two specialist contractors have examined it and both recommend that it be drained and the clay lining re-puddled and, in addition, the accumulated silt in the bottom be removed. This could be a considerable expense for the Council and it has been agreed to set aside some reserves each year to build up the necessary funds. The council’s vision is to improve the pond area over time, for example, reinstating the nature reserve area at one end, replacing two smaller benches and possibly installing a pond-dipping platform.