

# HEPPING FOREST CENTRE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Monday, 6 October 2014

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest Centre Joint Consultative Committee held at the Guildhall EC2 at 11.15 am

## Present

### Members:

Alderman Gordon Haines (Chairman)	Verderer Richard Morris
Geoff Brown, FSC Honorary Treasurer	Anthony Thomas

### Officers:

Katie Odling	Town Clerk's Department
Sue Ireland	Director of Open Spaces
Paul Thomson	Superintendent, Epping Forest
Steve Bunce	Epping Forest Field Studies Centre
Simon Ward	FSE London
Jo Hurst	Open Spaces Department

## 1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from Deputy McGuinness, George Abrahams, Mark Bollard and Verderer Adams.

## 2. **DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF ANY PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA**

There were no declarations.

## 3. **MINUTES**

Resolved: the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

## 4. **HEATING ARRANGEMENTS AT EPPING FOREST FIELD STUDIES CENTRE**

Members were informed that the Epping Forest Field Centre at High Beach consisted of a main block housing five classrooms and office space, and other buildings used as accommodation (Ravensmead, Buxton and Harting) as well as a sundry classroom known as the Timber Hut.

On Friday 17th January 2014 a Mitie Inspector visited the premises and confirmed "*both boilers locked off & oil line shut as they are immediately dangerous*" this was due to hazardous levels of carbon monoxide being produced from the system. Although it was initially believed that parts could be found and replaced quickly, not all the replacement parts could be sourced from the Italian manufacturer due to the age of the system. The City Surveyor therefore

determined it was not economical to repair, and a wholesale replacement was required.

Members noted that heating in the teaching block would be compromised for an extended period of many weeks, and large numbers of temporary electric units could not be used due to loading on circuits. The Epping Forest Assets Manager made the temporarily vacated High Beach Visitor Centre available to the Field Centre Team for lessons. This building's wood-chip fired boiler was also inoperative at the time, so this space and teaching block offices were heated using supplementary electric units. This arrangement lasted through the cold months until the site was taken over by the Friends of Epping Forest and full heating of the Teaching Block was not required.

In response to a query, Officers clarified that the costs of lighting, heating and some cleaning of the High Beach Visitor Centre building through this period were met by Epping Forest local risk budgets.

## 5. **EPPING FOREST FIELD CENTRE PROGRESS AND BACKGROUND TO PLANNING**

Members noted that the Epping Forest Field Centre (EFFC) delivered the City of London's environmental learning service in Epping Forest; it was established to commemorate the European Year of Conservation in 1970. From its inception the service has been managed by the Field Studies Council (FSC) for, and on behalf of, the City of London Corporation. FSC was an independent educational charity that inspires environmental understanding through first-hand experience. The buildings (teaching and ancillary facilities and staff residences) were maintained by the City.

Members noted that they received reports in 2013 and in 2014 at the meeting in May and noted pleasing progress and achievements. EFFC connected a diverse range of learners (school children, adults and families) of all abilities to the natural world in Epping Forest. The majority of learners are from Greater London with a significant number also coming from Essex with comparatively high numbers of pupils that have free school meals, 'English as an additional language' (BME backgrounds) and/or diverse ethnicity. The service promoted Epping Forest as '*a wonderful place for discovery and learning*' and fostered responsible behaviours in relation to Epping Forest and the wider environment.

Officers said that the Centre delivered its 500,000th learner experience in 2011. Delivery against the 2011-14 Plan had been effective as outlined below.

Maintenance was carried out by contractors employed by the City of London. (Defect reporting and monitoring, cleaning duties, grounds maintenance duties and routine repairs will be undertaken by Centre staff). The Centre continued to be generally very well maintained by the City and its contractors. The Centre Grounds and nearby learning sites continued to be very suitable for the provision of a range of great learning experiences.

The Head of Centre was supported a ten full-time staff of which two are at senior level. Eight members of the staff had field teaching as the main part of

their responsibilities. One member of staff is the Administrator (reception, bookings & finance processor) another is Centre Support Facilitator (main duty person, liaison with contactors, clients, volunteers, visiting tutors). Income generation from courses in 2014 is strong. Our 2014 Plan indicated the 'need to focus more on course income and viability (and on quality) rather than overly focussing on high numbers of learning experiences'. As at the summer of 2014 Officers were on target to match or exceed the 2014 course income budget estimate.

In response to a query, Members noted that a 36% staff turnover in 2014 was proving to be challenging especially at a time of updating for curriculum reform and coping with heating related issues and other disrupting factors, especially staff sickness. A consequence of these factors was slower than desired progress with funding acquisition, development work and promotional activity. However, income and expenditure for the year appeared to be broadly in line with budget estimates and visitor feedback continues to be excellent and there has been good progress with some developments. The performance probably exceeded that which might reasonably be expected and the new team were enthusiastically embracing the challenge of making further progress in the Autumn Term.

#### **6. EPPING FOREST FIELD CENTRE PLAN AND FINANCIAL ESTIMATES 2015**

Members were informed that progress in the period 2011-14 had been very good. The Committee received a report on 2013 performance at its meeting in May 2014 and noted the strong financial performance and significant achievement. As at the summer of 2014 the Centre performance remained broadly in line with budget. Income generation remained strong despite a challenging economic back drop and delivery costs had been effectively constrained.

In recent years the Centre had delivered its services at what is effectively capacity level for the physical and human resources of the Centre. The prospects of maintaining this in the future were very good given the exceptionally high levels of service user satisfaction. Flexibility and diversity of provision had been crucial to success and were likely to continue to be important factors in coping with the impacts of curriculum reform and other changes in the operating environment.

Members noted that staffing remained the crucial controllable determinant of income as well as expenditure. It was also the resource that determined the degree of success in the delivery of mission and achievement of the objectives in this Plan; retention and successful succession planning would continue to be of crucial importance.

Officers informed Members that subject to funding it was hoped that Officers could:

- significantly increase biological recording and the utilisation of this important data.

- pair subject expert Associate Tutors with dynamic and highly skilled ‘new generation’ tutors (this should build the field skills and taxonomic/ecological expertise of the latter and the capacity for continuation of this learning long into the future and ‘freshen’ presentational styles in the short term).
- tower and low ropes project.
- ICT technology (extract from development fund application).

7. **QUESTIONS**

There were no questions.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no urgent business.

**The meeting closed at 12.55 pm**

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Chairman