

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Epping Forest Joint Consultative	20 April 2012	
Subject: Epping Forest Visitor Services Activities	Public	
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest	For Information	
<p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>In previous years, the Visitor Services Team has provided reports summarising the previous six months of service provision for visitors to Epping Forest. This is the first report where the Visitor Services Team sets out its programme of work for the coming financial year.</p> <p>The first part of the report is a summary of the Visitor Services Team's staffing structure and operational priorities. The second part of the report addresses priorities for the next twelve months and is particularly focussed on the staffing structure and operational priorities associated with the implementation of the Epping Forest Staffing Review and the opening of the new Visitor Centre situated on Rangers Road, Chingford in Spring 2012.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That this report be received. 		

Main Report

Background

1. In previous years, outcomes from the Epping Forest Visitor Services Programme have been reported retrospectively to the Epping Forest Joint Consultative Committee, with respect to the six month Summer and Winter activity programmes. Following a decision by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, this report is now presented to both your Committee and the Epping Forest and Commons Committee as an operational programme for the forthcoming 12 months, setting out the operational activities for the Epping Forest Division's Visitor Services Team.

Current Position

2. Staffing - Current Visitor Services staffing is detailed in Appendix 1.

3. There are seven areas the Visitor Services Team focus on and they are as follows –
 - i) Delivering an information service to Epping Forest visitors through three Forest Visitor Centres
 - ii) Providing memorable visits through complimentary retail activity
 - iii) Providing Life Long Learning sessions
 - iv) Entertaining visitors to Epping Forest through the management and hosting of Forest Events
 - v) Interpreting the significance of Epping Forest through exhibitions, publications and website presence
 - vi) Developing a communications presence for Epping Forest through publications, the City of London Website, Press statements and social networking platforms such as Twitter
 - vii) Developing wider public participation in formal sport, especially football at Wanstead Flats.

Operating the Forest Centres

4. The Visitor Services Team currently delivers an information service for Epping Forest visitors from three buildings: The Epping Forest Visitor Centre, a purpose built building located at High Beach and opened in 1991; The Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge built in 1543 and specifically protected under the Epping Forest Act 1878 and managed as a visitor attraction since 2001; and The Temple at Wanstead Park, restored in 1995 and currently offering information services over weekends and Bank Holidays.

4.1 Visitor Centre Opening Times

	VC	QEHL	Temple
Winter opening hours (October to March)	7 days a week, 10.00a.m. – 3.00p.m.	Friday to Sunday, 11.00a.m. – 4.00p.m. (Booked groups Mon-Thurs)	Saturday and Sunday, 10.00a.m. – 3.00p.m.
Winter hours per week	35	15	10
Summer opening hours (April to September) (October to March)	Every day, 10.00a.m. – 5.00p.m.	Wednesday to Sunday, 12.00p.m. – 5.00p.m. (Booked groups Mondays and Tuesdays)	Saturday and Sunday, 12.00p.m. – 5.00p.m.
Summer hours per week	49	25	10

4.2 The current three Visitor Services buildings received 63,997 visits during 2011. The Epping Forest Visitor Centre at High Beach received 28,560 visitors in 2011, the Hunting Lodge received 23,219 (not including booked Educational visits) and the Temple received 12,218 visitors.

4.3 The Visitor Centres are also responsible for income generation from retail activity and income has grown in the last three years. 2011/12 has been our most successful year with turnover predicted to break £80,000 for the first time ever.

Visitor Centre Income (£k)

Year	Visitor Centre	Hunting Lodge	The Temple	Total
2008/09	43,346	9,445	5,480	58,271
2009/10	46,397	12,396	7,280	66,073
2010/11	54,022	12,095	7,508	73,625
2011/12*	54,951*	11,390*	6,895*	73,236*

* = As at end of January 2012, two months still short of financial year end.

4.4 Delivering Life Long Learning Sessions

4.4.1 Learning sessions are on an upward curve reflecting the endeavours of the current Learning Officer. Learning sessions have been as follows –

Year (April – March)	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Sessions	47	97	123	118*	132 (as at Feb 2012)

* *Year 2010 saw a slight dip as we had to close for a 10 day period to allow unacceptably noisy building work to take place at the Chingford Hub site.*

4.4.2 These figures include all learning sessions, including the Discovering Epping Forest Modules, Gun Powder Sessions and Sensory Sessions.

4.4.3 The Lifelong Learning Officer also hosts a Teachers Forum where approximately 20 local teachers meet on a quarterly basis to discuss educational issues.

Public Events

5. The Visitor Services Team leads on numerous events each year that include outdoor theatre events, family learning events, guided walks, cycle rides and exhibitions. Visitor Services also play a supporting role in advertising and promoting many further events led by our close partners such as Friends of Epping Forest, Field Studies Centre and others.

Year (Jan – December)	2009	2010	2011	2012 (taken from 2012 Events Diary)
Visitor Services Events	62	66	65	60
Total Events	203	210	185	232

Producing Forest Interpretation

6. Each year Visitor Services produces;
- i) Three editions of the ‘Forest Focus’ visitor news with a total print run of 7,000 per edition.
 - ii) Annual Events Diary highlighting events run by all the main organisations in the Forest. Print run of 15,000.
 - iii) Subject specific leaflets.
 - iv) Forest Signs including stock signs such as ‘Beware Cattle’; seasonal signs for dog control during ground nesting bird season; fungi picking etc. and site specific signage.
 - v) Football Season Handbook.
7. Epping Forest is also on the Social Networking site ‘Twitter’ that gives us the opportunity to post short messages on key news and subjects and we produce our own Press Releases as well as updating our Website on at least a weekly basis.

Developing Football and other sports

8. There are 58 football pitches and 3 separate sports pavilions within the Wanstead Flats site of Epping Forest. Currently the Grounds Staff (4) report to the Assets Officer within the Business Team whilst the Football Development Officer reports into the Visitor Services Manager.
9. The Football Development Officer works towards implementing objectives outlined in the Football Development Plan and has key goals including maximising occupancy of the football pitches, development of female football, increasing the amount of qualified coaches and referees through formal training and examinations and assisting any disability groups through formal and informal football.

10. Wanstead Flats also hosts a weekly 5km ‘parkrun’ event and hosts weekly health walks every Tuesday mornings.

Proposals

11. As well as continuing to deliver the areas set out above the following changes will take place in 2012/13

Visitor Services Staffing Structure

12. The proposed staffing structure is set out in Appendix 1.

Proposed Changes

13. By incorporating the Wanstead Flats Grounds Staff into the Visitor Services Department there will be a greater emphasis placed upon on the quality of the visitor experience, together with improved marketing and promotion. Summer Football Tournaments will grow in number and there will be a greater emphasis with regard to a chain of custody in the customer booking process. Communication and co-ordination between the Grounds Staff and the Football Development Officer will be improved and the greater involvement of local volunteers will be nurtured.
14. Similarly the incorporation of staff at Chingford Golf Course into the Visitor Services Department will see a greater focus on communication between the Grounds staff, the Golf Professional and golf users with a focus on improving the quality of play; the maintenance and improvement of the course and the overall profitability of the operation.

Operating the Forest Centres

15. The future of the High Beach Visitor Centre is currently under discussion, however, there is a proposal to change the opening times when the new Visitor Centre opens at Chingford to reflect the location proximity to Chingford Town Centre and to capitalise on the opportunity to increase visitor numbers and generate more income.

Proposed Opening Times

	VC @ Chingford	QEHL	Temple
Peak Opening Hours (13 weeks of school holidays and all weekends)	7 days a week, 10.00a.m. – 5.00p.m.	7 days a week, 10:00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.	Saturday and Sunday, 10.00a.m. – 3.00p.m.
Peak hours per week	49	49	10

Off Peak Opening Hours (Monday to Friday during Term Times)	5 days a week, 10.00a.m. – 5.00p.m.	5 days a week, 12.00p.m. – 5.00p.m. (Booked groups in morning)	Saturday and Sunday, 12.00p.m. – 5.00p.m.
Off Peak hours per week	35	25	10

Delivering Life Long Learning Sessions

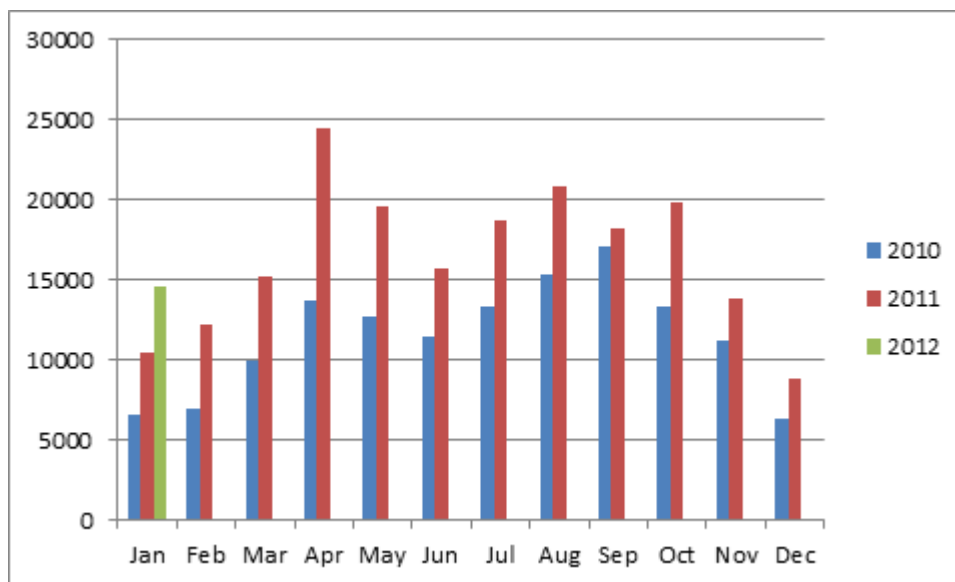
16. The current Learning Provision is delivered by the Life Long Learning Officer. The reliance on a single officer to deliver a popular educational programme remains a challenge with the opening of the new Community Room at the new Visitor Centre, which will stimulate the expansion of our Learning Provision,.
17. Under the Service Review, two Information Assistant posts will be realigned to focus on delivery of learning sessions that will give the current Life Long Learning Officer the chance to develop their role into the ‘Forest Centre Officer’ ethos whilst still retaining the leadership on all learning events. This will ensure we can continue to grow our education sessions by 5% for the next three years, in line with the City Bridge Trust targets.

Public Events

18. Visitor Services will continue to provide a varied programme of events including 3 Outdoor Theatre Events, Family Learning Events during all Half Term Holidays, exhibitions at the Temple and weekend events.
19. 2012/13 will also see a full programme of Temporary Exhibitions, held at the new Visitor Centre at Chingford in the dedicated Temporary Exhibition space. The first two months (April and May 2012) will see a children’s art exhibition and then June and July will see a ‘Royalty and the Forest’ temporary exhibition held. Further exhibitions are currently being planned.

Producing Forest Interpretation

20. Visitor Services will continue to produce three editions of Forest Focus and the Events Diary for 2013 as well as ensuring a stock of promotional leaflets are available. We will continue to develop relationships between the local press and ourselves by continuing to produce Press Releases.
21. Particular allocation will be focussed on the development of our digital communication with the public by re-launching our Web Site in June 2012 with the intention of increasing web hits beyond the 2011 182,000 2011 total. The Team will also concentrate efforts on our Twitter account seeking to increase the number of followers.



22. Visitor Services are also playing an integral role in undertaking an audit of all Forest Signage to produce a programme of improvement. Visitor Service staff are also assisting with setting and agreeing the Forest Standards for all Forest furniture including the Gateways, benches, bins and any other ‘furniture’.

Developing Football and Other Sports

23. The Football Development Officer will continue to develop coaching schemes and community outreach projects in line with the Sports Development Plan.
24. There are 58 football pitches and three separate Sports Pavilions at Wanstead Flats. The Harrow Road Sports Pavilion was redeveloped during 2009. The other facilities at Aldersbrook Road and Capel Road remain in need of upgrading and improvement. Prior to progressing any works to the Capel Road Changing Rooms, a future management strategy for this property should be established. It was previously proposed as the potential third phase of a three phased approach of the Wanstead Flats Refurbishment Project that was reported on the 13th November 2006, with the intention at that time to undertake a structural survey to identify the extent of works to meet Football Foundation standards. There has been subsequent considered as to whether it would be possible or desirable to amalgamate the Aldersbrook Road and Capel Road facilities. If Capel Road is to be improved, a management strategy would help inform the scope of works in the short to medium term to ensure that it represents value for money. Any works proposals will now need to be subject to the City's Project Approval process.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

25. The proposal, if approved, supports the following themes of the Community Strategy:

- A Vibrant and Culturally Rich City

Additionally the proposal supports the following aim of the Open Spaces Business Plan:

- Providing high quality, free, accessibly Open Spaces for the benefit of London, its environs and the nation.

Conclusion

26. The Visitor Services programme provides a variety of opportunities for active and virtual engagement of visitors with a wide variety of recreational activities at Epping Forest. The Visitor Services Team also plays a vital role in providing information with regard to the active stewardship of the Forest by the Conservators of Epping Forest.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Staffing Structure

Contact:

Antony Fenwick | antony.fenwick@cityoflondon.gov.uk | 0208 532 5315