

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	20 05 2019
Subject: Epping Forest Operations Programme for 2019/2020 (SEF 14/19)	Public
Report of: Colin Buttery. Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
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Summary

This report outlines the conservation, visitor access and risk management projects proposed in the Forest for the year 2019/20.

The main theme for the habitat's conservation work continues to be operations aimed at managing the Favourable Condition of the Site of Special Scientific Interest, which has been supported through DEFRA funding. A focus in 2019 will be for each area worked under the 10-year HLS wood-pasture restoration programme to have a maintenance visit. The grazing programme will continue to expand with the key aim being to unite the Bury Wood and Chingford grazing areas to ensure more extensive, less intensive grazing over a longer season.

The work programme also addresses key areas of risk, particularly those related to woody vegetation along highway verges, fly-tipping, rough sleeping and tree safety. An issue for the coming year will be the continuing response to and resources required in relation to the increased risk posed by tree root nuisance and tree pests and diseases. There will also be attention focused on fire safety management building on lessons learnt in 2018 with fires across the Forest and specifically Wanstead Flats.

Access along the ride network is to be addressed through tackling over-growing vegetation through systematic survey and remedial work. We will be working with local volunteers to deliver access improvement at Highams Park

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve the annual work programme as summarised in the main report.

Main Report

Background

1. This report describes significant conservation, visitor access and risk management projects proposed in Epping Forest for the programme year 2019-2020.
2. The work outlined below is drawn from the 2004-10 Epping Forest Management Plan and subsequent documents and strategies developed from that Plan (see Background papers below). The habitat work is also determined by Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) *Favourable Condition* and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) *Favourable Conservation Status* priorities which have been agreed and approved by Natural England.

Current Position

3. The Forest completed a 10-year Environmental Stewardship -Entry Level and - Higher Level Schemes (ELS-HLS) DEFRA-funded agreement with Natural England in October 2018. This programme involved both revenue and capital works funding for conservation work across the Forest grasslands, heaths, wood-pasture and, also, the grasslands of the Buffer Lands. The capital funding supported major works for both invisible and hard fencing installations. The grant also supported the grazing herd with an extra supplement for native breeds at risk. A new funding application for the successor scheme, Countryside Stewardship (CSS), is currently being developed to continue the management work for these key habitats.
4. A total of 189 ha of our grass and haylage cutting and the bulk of our highway verge cutting is now undertaken by local contractors Warren Smith Farming Ltd and Bush Wheeler Services respectively. Following a tender process, three-year agreements were made in 2018 with these local enterprises to deliver agreed works.

Proposals

5. The proposed 2019/20 programme focuses on the maintenance of the sites restored under the 10-year HLS wood-pasture restoration programme that ended in 2018, increasing the number of grazing cattle across Buffer Land and Forest grasslands and managing risks, particularly those related to woody vegetation on highway verges, tree pests and diseases, fly-tipping and tree safety. We will also be working on increasing the planned response to risks associated with Forest paths and tree root nuisance claims, both of which give rise to a significant number of our insurance claims.
6. Following the completion of the Individual Site Management Plans (ISMP) for Theydon Bois Green and Highams Park, work priorities will be incorporated into the Forest Management Plan as resources allow, with reduced activity associated with annual conservation. For 2019 this is likely to see continuation of grass mowing regimes, but also the removal of encroaching bramble and smaller scrub. In addition, work will continue with Natural England examining ways to

improve the Favourable Condition Status of the Highams Park compartment, although costed proposals would be considered for a CSS application later in 2020.

7. Following retendering in 2018, and the subsequent good performance of the contractors involved, it is proposed that we continue with bulk contracts for highway verge cutting and grassland management. In partnership with the City Procurement Service (CPS), the City Corporation will re-tender the haylage contract in 2019 on the basis of a three-year agreement being reached.

A Beautiful Wood Pasture - Wood pasture restoration

8. It is planned to focus activity on the maintenance of the areas opened up as part of the restoration programme under the 10-year ELS-HLS agreement. The maintenance requirements vary according to each area. In some, this year, grazing is sufficient (e.g. Long Running heath), in others mechanical flailing of regrowth may be required (e.g. parts of Bury Wood), whilst in other areas volunteers will continue conservation tasks.
9. Alongside the basic maintenance of the ground flora and tall vegetation, further work is being planned for management of the trees that have been opened up in these areas, particularly through continuing the re-pollarding cycle. These latter operations are being planned as part of the CSS application referred to in paragraph 3 above and subject to a separate report. If the CSS application is approved by your Committee and Natural England, winter work on some of the trees may begin in January 2020, focusing on key areas of Oak-Hornbeam lowland wood-pasture habitat, like Bury Wood.
10. All areas opened up in the ELS-HLS Programme were resurveyed in 2018/19 and proposals for the maintenance approaches to these sites, totalling an estimated 200 ha, are being reviewed. The aim for 2019/20 would be to start a cyclical maintenance programme and this year to fully assess the practical maintenance needs and commitments required for future years. It is proposed that this work will largely be undertaken with in-house staff.
11. In addition, some outstanding contract work on wood-pasture restoration at Lords Bushes would be completed, continuing the opening up of glades and rides and the haloing of ancient oak pollards there. A communication plan is to be part of this work to ensure that local residents and visitors are aware of the proposed works following feedback in 2018.

Grassland Management

12. Open grass areas across the Forest will be cut using a similar programme as in previous years with contractors undertaking around 50% of the work by area (72 hectares). The Wanstead Flats mowing regime is being reviewed and a new rotational mowing regime is to be organised. This will take account of the areas that were sub-soiled during the fires of 2018 and which may need restoration work to prevent the loss of acid grassland interest. It also seeks to build on the work of the rotational mowing of the last 10 years to maintain areas of good

quality for Skylark nesting, but also ensure removal of more of the old grass (or “thatch”) which remains a fire hazard.

13. In addition to this work on grassland restoration, discussions will take place with Natural England about the use of sub-soiling and mowing at Leyton Flats for extending and widening the fire-break network there (see paragraph 30 below also).

Volunteer Habitat Management Activity

14. Connected with the work on acid grasslands in the south of the Forest, staff and volunteers from The Wren Group and Wanstead Birders will continue with the ongoing Skylark census on Wanstead Flats. There are currently four possible territories being held this spring, but the key will be to observe whether each area sees young raised and also to monitor the number of broods that are achieved. A similar census will be undertaken for the Meadow Pipits, another declining ground-nesting bird.
15. At Wanstead Park Exchange Land support and advice will continue to be given to The Wren Group in its excellent volunteer conservation work on the grassland mosaic there, restoring butterfly habitats for species such as the Brown Argus.
16. The Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) will also continue their varied task programme across the Forest, focusing on the wood-pasture restoration, ponds and bogs (see also paragraph 23 below). This group’s invaluable work has contributed significantly to the achievement of habitat restoration, particularly on the smaller and more sensitive habitats like glades and bogs.

Grazing

17. As in 2018, the main aim will be to ensure extensive grazing rotated through the summer across the three large invisible-fenced areas of Fairmead, Bury Wood and Chingford Plain.
18. A *trial* grazing project will be implemented on the East Plain at Wanstead Park. An approximately 1800m *Boviguard*™ invisible fencing (IF) loop will be installed on the plain with the intention that cattle can graze from September 2020 onwards with a review of the project in 2021. Installing the *Boviguard*™ cable will require Archaeological Priority Area (APA) permission. Although the cable is buried no deeper than 15cm (6 inches), a walk-over survey would be conducted, as has been the case with previous IF cable laying in the Forest. In addition, a supervising archaeologist would be present on the day of the installation.
19. It is hoped this will provide a solution to managing this important area of acid grassland, with its distinctive ant-hills and important butterfly populations, as well as testing a way forward for managing other areas in the Park such as the Long Walk. This project will require a considerable amount of practical community support, as well as consultation, and development activity would be started during 2019.

Ponds/Lakes/Bogs

20. Monthly monitoring for Floating Pennywort at Wanstead Park will be continued during 2019 using a specialist contractor, with any outbreaks responded to as they appear.
21. During 2019 we will be working with colleagues from the City Surveyor's Department to confirm works to stabilise the substantial bankside erosion problems at Jubilee Pond. Additionally, at Highams Park with support from the City Surveyors Department we will be looking at a combination of 'hard' and 'soft' wharfing along the lake edge to reduce erosion of the bank and to improve water and habitat quality. Hard wharfing is the more traditional timber edge while soft wharfing is the use of plants to create a natural protective edge.
22. Following excellent clearance work at Speakman's Pond by volunteers from the (then) Epping Forest Centenary Trust, the tenders for removal and control programmes will be reviewed for the Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) New Zealand Pygmy-weed (*Crassula helmsii*).
23. *Froglife* was successful in its grant bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of Cow Pond (subject to a separate report to Committee in January 2018). Although, originally planned for winter 2019-20, the restoration work may not begin until later in 2020 as *Froglife* is seeking some further matched funding for the overall project which involves other sites outside the Forest. Nonetheless, it is expected that a small trial borehole, to check water levels prior to the start of excavation works will be carried out.
24. More minor works, largely by volunteers, will continue to be planned for the Forest bogs to ensure water levels are secured and over-growing vegetation removed. These follow recommendations on bog conservation following a 2016-2017 survey of all Forest bogs by the County Botanical recorder, Dr Ken Adams (see Background Papers below).

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) work

25. Monitoring of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM), using external consultants, would continue over at least 17 main sites as in 2018, with control measures taken as required. It is expected to see a large increase in the number of trees affected and the number of OPM nests. However, removal of nests will be targeted to where the most immediate risks of exposure to visitors are found.
26. The annual Japanese Knotweed control, which was featured recently in a horticultural magazine, will be carried out across the 3 or so remaining sites – with older sites also being re-checked.

A Welcoming Destination:

Ride and Path Management

27. A path management Policy Development Note (PDN) will be completed for the summer of 2019 following an audit of paths in 2018. This work has been slightly delayed, however, as the audit process was undertaken in a different way from that originally planned. A more robust path monitoring process is now in place that better meets the occupier's liability requirements.
28. From Aug/Sept 2019 it is expected we will commence a programme of works to tackle overgrowing vegetation along the track sides followed by works on the path side drainage. Within the SSSI area, once identified, any such work would be subject to evaluation and consent from Natural England. We will implement an annual path monitoring programme to cover a proportion of the paths each year. Routine maintenance of path edge vegetation will be continued across the whole network.

Bury Road Car Park

29. Following on from works to improve the traffic flow in the various car parks at Bury road in 2018/19 with colleagues from the Visitor Services team we will implement a programme of enhanced maintenance. This will seek to improve the look and feel of this increasingly popular area following on from investment by the City at the Golf Course and our Tenants in the Holly Trail Café and Go Further cycling.

Whitehall Plain Bridge

30. In association with the Department of the Built Environment we will continue to look at erecting a new bridge or raised boardwalk across the River Ching on Whitehall Plain in the location of the deteriorating culvert bridge. This activity has continued from 2018. In addition to the river crossing, sections of the paths leading to the bridge have been cut through by drainage grips creating muddy, deep hollows in places. Improvements over these eroded sections will be reviewed as possible additions to the bridge works.

Protected and Celebrated Heritage Landscapes

Wanstead Park: Parkland Plan

31. The Parkland Plan is now complete and will be brought for consideration to a future meeting of both the Epping Forest and Commons Committee and the Epping Forest Consultative Committee. A 'Shadow Project Board' was established in 2018 to provide coordination now that the Large Raised Reservoirs have been declared 'High Risk' by the Environment Agency, for taking forward both the statutory requirements under the Reservoirs and Flood & Water Management Acts (now that three Lakes in the Park); water supply; flood protection and the response to 'Heritage at Risk' through the Parkland Plan development proposals. Continuing this wider project development under an established Project Board will be an important focus for 2019.

Highams Park

32. We will be working with the Highams Park Community Interest Company (HPCIC) to improve access to the lake edge through path and lake edge standing improvements and the erection of new orientation signage. The HPCIC has obtained the funding for the materials and a combination of staff and volunteers will undertake the works.
33. During 2019 it is proposed that we work with local volunteers to seek funding for proposals to develop a north-south multi-user surfaced path through the Park either by restoring the west bank original estate coach drive or following the strong 'wish way' on the east side of the lake. Any work proposals in Highams Park, which is part of the SSSI and SAC and a locally listed Park, would require consent from Natural England and the London Borough of Waltham Forest, and may also require further consultations locally.

Butlers Retreat

34. If funding allows works will be undertaken at Butlers Retreat to renovate the seating area to the front of Butlers Retreat to improve the quality of the grass reinforcement mesh surfacing, together with the high wear. We will also surface the seating fixed seating area to the rear of the building.

Churchill Avenue: Woodford Green

35. The delayed re-working of the London Plane and Poplar tree avenue at Woodford Green, that leads up to the Winston Churchill statue for tree safety purposes will be actioned this year. A community and stakeholder information process has been initiated with the aim that arborists would start work in September 2019 when ground conditions are favourable and bird nesting has ended. It is proposed that we undertake the phased replanting of the avenue and subject to the outcome of the public information process, and a potential public appeal, replanting will occur during November/December 2019.

A Resilient Environment:

Highway Verge Management

36. Ongoing maintenance of highways edge vegetation will largely be contracted out through a three-year agreement with a local provider. In-house teams will focus on the more challenging locations where there are a number of constraints such as frequent parked cars and on maintaining sightlines at path and road junctions. One significant task will be the management of roadside elm alongside Bell Common, Epping which would be managed over the next 2 years by reducing the height of the elms to ensure the hazards of falling stems are removed. The work at Bell Common has been delayed from 2018.

Tree Safety

37. Trees identified for hazard removal will be a significant proportion of spring and summer programmes for the Arborist Teams. The annual tree safety survey program is undertaken by contractors and this is to be retendered this year on a

three-year basis. Overall, works to make good dangerous trees takes up the equivalent of one arborist team's year.

Fire Safety

38. Some 6km of fire control lines are cut at least twice a year in the summer on Leyton and Wanstead Flats. Following the fire at Wanstead Flats the need for additional preventative measures will be reviewed in association with Natural England and the Fire Service. The particular considerations will be the need to de-fuel certain habitats; reduce the impact of scrub in forming a 'ladder' for the fire to reach the crowns of larger trees and the need to consider more fully the risks associated with adjacent infrastructure, such as residences; petrol stations; electricity sub-stations and road and rail links (see also habitat work above).

Insurance Claims

39. In association with the City of London's insurance, management policies for Tree Root nuisance and a Policy Development Note will be prepared for the Autumn 2019. This is one area where each year the City Corporation receives substantial legal claims and it is increasing evident that a review of practice is desirable. Working with our insurers we will investigate the benefits of preventative measures in locations with a cluster of subsidence claims. One possible project being considered for work in the winter of 2019/20 is to reduce the tree cover along Mays Lane, Chingford. Reducing the tree cover will help to reduce subsidence and tree safety liabilities and will also provide the opportunity to improve a currently overlooked part of the Forest. The intention would be to achieve a condition where it will be relatively cheap and easy to maintain the Lane and also to ease monitoring of the safety and root nuisance problems.

Large Raised Reservoirs (LRR):

40. Woody and herbaceous vegetation will be kept cut on raised reservoirs. Further works will follow on from the six-monthly Panel engineer inspections and will be undertaken in association with the Built Environment Department. In line with requirements in our water abstraction licence from the EA we will initiate works to improve the flow of water to the lakes via the local drainage network. This will involve some improvement to ditches to ensure the water flows more directly to the lakes and also investigation of drainage pipes out falling into the lakes to check they are running smoothly.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

41. The proposals outlined above contribute to two of the three Corporate aims to:
- Contribute to a flourishing society;
 - and
 - Shape outstanding environments
42. For the Open Spaces Department Business Plan 2019-20, the proposals fulfil all 12 outcomes of the three top line Objectives, which are that:

- open spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible;
- spaces enrich people's lives;
- business practices are responsible and sustainable.

43. Epping Forest Management Plan - Management Plan - The proposals match a number of the Epping Forest Vision for the 21st Century's key visions including:

- Epping Forest's position as a unique and ancient landscape for people and wildlife will be strengthened;
- The Forest will retain its natural aspect with the diversity of wildlife habitats enhanced and the features of international importance protected;
- Epping Forest will be highly valued as part of a larger and fully accessible protected landscape area.

Implications

44. **Financial** - The work outlined in the proposed work programme is to be covered by the local risk budget of Epping Forest Division. Additional grant aid and public fundraising will be sought where available to fund agreed activity.

45. **Legal** - Formal consent for these works has been sought from Natural England under Section 28E of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) for the SSSI and as required under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 in relation to the SAC. Additional consents for work in locally listed landscapes and APAs will be sought during the year.

Conclusions

46. The work outlined above covers a large number of the Forest compartments and addresses key access issues across the Forest ride and pathway network and also risk management work, particularly along Forest roadsides and boundaries. The habitats programme, although reduced in scope to allow a full review this year, is the continuation of several decades of conservation work and a commitment to achieve the Favourable Condition of the SSSI compartments and Favourable Conservation Status of the SAC.

47. Volunteers will continue to be instrumental in delivering a significant proportion of the work on a number of key projects in 2019/20, including wood-pasture restoration and ponds work and their important contribution is acknowledged.

48. In-house teams will deliver much of the work detailed in the report. Contractors will be used to support implementation of the grass-cutting and highway vegetation management works as well as the key area of the wood-pasture restoration work at Lords Bushes.

Appendices

- Grazing Programme 2019

Background Papers

- The Epping Forest Management Plan 2004-2010;
- The Barn Hoppit Wood-pasture Restoration Plan 2006-2011;
- The Lords Bushes and Knighton Woods Integrated Site Plan 2004-2010;
- The Wanstead Flats Integrated Site Plan 2006-2011;
- Theydon Bois Green Individual Site Management Plan (2018)
- Highams Park, Little Sale and Oak Hill Woods Individual Site Management Plan (2019)
- Branching Out Stage II Project Plan (Nov 2008) – including the Keystone Trees and Grazing Strategies;
- SEF 01/13 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: Grazing Expansion Plan for Implementing the Epping Forest Grazing Strategy. 13th Feb 2013.
- Wanstead Park Conservation (2011);
- SEF 50/16 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: Epping Forest Grazing Expansion Plan Continuity Arrangements. 21st November 2016
- The Topology and Vegetational History of Some Epping Forest Sphagnum Bogs (Report to EF Conservators - K.J. Adams 2017).
- Highway Verge Management Policy Development Note (2018)

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