



# Epping Forest

Registered Charity



## Summative evaluation report

## Branching Out

City of London Corporation



LOTTERY FUNDED

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## Executive Summary

The £6.5 million Branching Out project in Epping Forest was developed and run by the Conservators of Epping Forest (part of City of London Corporation) and included a wide-ranging package of work such as transport strategies; interpretation; visitor research; visitor and destination management; volunteering and community engagement; conservation grazing; tree management; archival research and management; forest education and training. The project was delivered by a collaborative cross-departmental team working hand-in-hand with volunteers, partner organisations, contractors and local communities.

Although the project increased in both value and timescale, the original vision and four aims remained constant and the project has successfully met or exceeded targets. Branching Out has delivered a consistently high quality of work and innovation across all work areas. It has enabled scientific work and conservation techniques to flourish and provided the focus needed to rethink people's relationship with the Forest.

The project undertook groundwork such as improving the welcome and infrastructure for visitors, opening-up new lines of communication and ways of working with communities and created a foundation from which innovative conservation work and landscape management is being implemented.

The project has enabled City of London Corporation to gain the insight required to make more informed decisions and put appropriate management frameworks in place to ensure the future of the Forest. For example, richer information about the estimated 4.2million annual visitors has enabled prioritisation of resource to where most community benefit will be gained and mapping of keystone trees and testing out arboreal approaches has allowed for their future management to be better planned.

However, perhaps the greatest achievement of Branching Out is not the number of metres of accessible pathway that are now open or the rise in saproxylic beetles resulting from wood-pasture restoration but the organisation itself reconnecting with its original purpose. The broad spectrum of work involved in this project has helped to establish a greater visitor and community centred culture within the organisation and for heritage to be better valued; which in themselves constitute game changing legacies. It is perhaps symbolic that the threshold signage welcoming visitors and residents into the Forest is being installed at the end of the project; signalling the start of a change in attitudes and perceptions of Epping Forest and the way in which people are involved with both creating and telling its long and ever-evolving story. It is the start of a new era.

Lessons learnt from the project are actively being fed into future strategy including the Epping Forest Management Plan which will be ready to launch in 2017. Furthermore Branching Out has created a solid stepping stone from which The Conservators of Epping Forest can tackle future major projects with the organisation better equipped, better connected and better able to tackle the challenges and opportunities they will bring.



## 'Branching Out' at Epping Forest



An estimated **4.2 million visitors** visit Epping Forest every year, most of them live within a few miles

There are **220 sq m of Interpretation** helping to change perceptions of the Forest

**4 visitor hubs** have been created and threshold signage and interpretation now welcomes people into the Forest

The project cost a total of **£6.5 million** in total with **£4.7 million from HLF**

**21,186 volunteer hours** were given to the project in 13/14

**12,000 keystone trees** have been identified and recorded

Cattle have been continuously grazing Epping Forest for over a 1,000 years and are continuing to do so as a result of **pioneering invisible fencing**

**15 apprentices** have been trained as part of the project

**£1.4m was invested** in creating a new gateway to the Forest at The View





## 1. Project Overview

Epping Forest is the largest of the City's Open Spaces at 6,165 acres. The forest stretches 12 miles from Manor Park in east London to just north of Epping in Essex and provides a natural environment for members of the public to enjoy. Two thirds of the Forest is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area for Conservation (SAC).

### 1.1 Branching Out vision and aims

The Branching Out project began in late 2009 finishing in December 2016. It was a large scale £6.5 million project with the central aim of improving Epping Forest for its visitors. Its vision was:

*'Innovative Open Space Management achieved through social inclusion, education and enjoyment.'*

There were four core aims of the Branching Out project that included a wide-ranging package of work such as transport strategies; interpretation; visitor research; visitor and destination management; volunteering and community engagement; conservation grazing; tree management; archival research and management; forest education and training. The aims of the project were as follows:

Extending opportunities to learn about Epping Forest's heritage

Raising awareness of what has been before through interpretation, history, and education

Improving access for all and working towards a more sustainable future

Re-establishing traditional forest management through grazing and pollarding



The project was delivered by a collaborative cross-departmental team working hand-in-hand with volunteers, partner organisations, contractors and local communities.

## 1.2 Funding breakdown

The total cost of the project was £6,525,000, with 74%, £4.8m, coming from primary funders, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).



Figure 1: A photograph of Ambresbury Banks in Epping Forest

£300,000 came as a contribution from Essex County Corporation, £280,000 was provided by the Tubney Charitable Trust, and approximately £15,000 was provided as sponsorship funding from Husqvarna UK.

The remainder of the funds were made up in cash, £800,000, and non-cash, in kind, £330,000, which included over £150,000 of volunteer hours.

## Funding breakdown

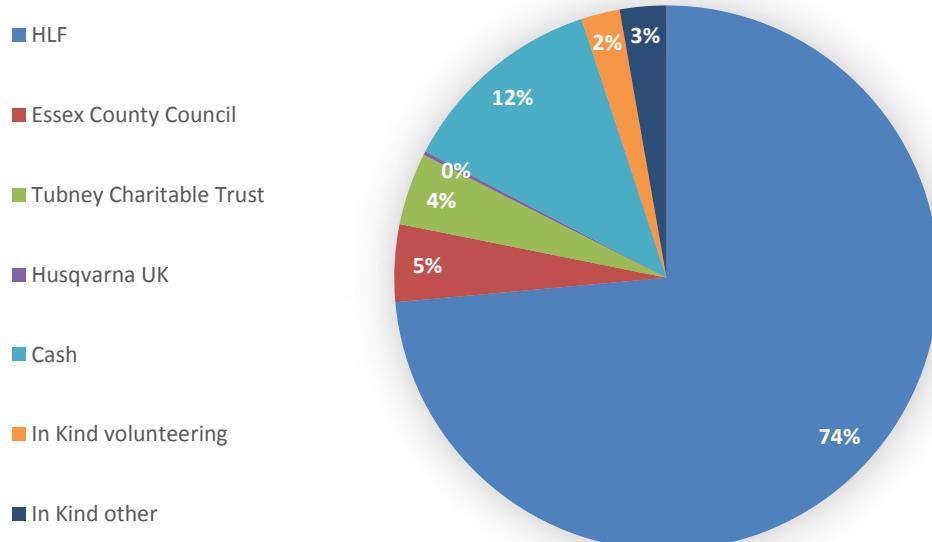


Figure 2: Pie chart showing the final breakdown of project funding



## 2. Evaluation Approach

Heritage Insider Ltd were appointed to conduct a summative evaluation in the final months of the Branching Out project. The **summative evaluation** needed to:

- Provide a valuable point of reflection for the project team and stakeholders
- Make an in-depth assessment of the impacts of the project, achievement of outcomes, key lessons learnt and identify any unexpected outcomes
- Form a key part of the final reporting to HLF; meeting HLF standards for evaluation and monitoring
- Document the legacy that is in place for the project and how this can be enhanced
- Provide a final review for the achievements of the project that can be used for evidence based advocacy to leverage further funding and support.

This document is the final report of this evaluation process.

The following potential issues were considered when structuring the evaluation approach:

**Getting data that will be useful for planning** – An evaluation should inform improvement and progress. The evaluation needed to be undertaken in a practical yet robust way that could be used to really inform planning and improvement. The sub-projects and overall project had already been collecting a range of data during the delivery phase. This was reviewed and assessed and then gaps identified for additional data collection to utilise the evaluation process and budget as effectively as possible.

**Understanding the stakeholder experience** – With a complex and innovative project such as this, the partner experience is important to understanding the success of the approach and project. Seeking honest feedback from a range of partners and internal stakeholders formed a key part of the additional independent data collection.

**Getting best value from the evaluation results** – If time, effort and resource is to be put into evaluation then the results should be worked as hard as possible. The evaluation process and results should therefore be intimately linked to evidence-based advocacy.

## 2.2 Monitoring and evaluation methods

This project utilised a variety of methods to evaluate the project, both qualitative and quantitative, to ensure that the aims and vision remained central to the activities and the project as a whole.

The list below shows all of the data collection methods that have fed into this summative evaluation:

- Initial scoping meeting and informal focus group with the Branching Out Project Manager and the Superintendent of Epping Forest
- Desk-based review of project documentation
- Review of reports including archive report and 2014 visitor survey data (2560 visits were mapped across ten sites throughout the forest in the summer of 2014. The surveyors followed a set route, plotting visitor location and other details such as age, gender, ethnicity and activity. Eight surveys, each approximately an hour long, were carried out on each site.) (See appendix 4 – Epping Forest visitor survey summary)
- Discovering Epping Forest project report on primary school learning experiences in the forest
- Fresh Eye visit<sup>1</sup> to The View and Butlers Retreat, an accessible pathway, a hub and a threshold point
- Structured feedback from arborist apprentices (1 survey) (see appendix 7 for summary)
- Online survey of volunteering experience
- Telephone interviews with teachers involved in Discover Epping Forest (1 teacher interview) (see appendix 3 for telephone interview script and appendix 8 for the interview responses)
- Semi-structured telephone interviews with 10 key members of the project using a palette of questions: (see appendix 2 for telephone script and appendix 5 for summary of responses)
  - Hayley Renae Cronin, General Manager, Codsteaks(Contractor/partner contact)
  - Martin Whitfield, Volunteer Development Officer, City of London staff
  - Alison Tapply, Community Liaison Officer, City of London staff
  - Alison Millward, Visitor survey (Contractor/partner contact)
  - Nicholas Sommerville, Architect City of London-Surveyors Department (The View & Butlers Retreat)
  - Catherine Cavanagh, Project Manager, City of London, Contracted project staff
  - Jeremy Dagley, Head of Conservation, City of London staff
  - Gavin Bodenham, Arborist Team Leader, City of London staff
  - Sophie Lillington, Forest Centres Officer (Heritage) City of London staff

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<sup>1</sup> Trademark Heritage Insider Ltd 2016. A Fresh Eye visit is a professional expert assessment of any given visitor experience.



- Anneke Kempton, Field Studies Corporation, involved with Discovering Epping Forest project(Contractor/partner contact)

A half day validation and recommendations workshop was held with key internal stakeholders. This workshop explored the high-level findings of the review team and discussed recommendations and how they can be taken forward.

A further presentation of findings was given at the all staff update meeting in November 2016.



### 3. Were the aims met?

The project successfully addressed all four areas of work outlined in the project plans, as shown below:

Re-establishing traditional forest management through grazing and pollarding

Improving access for all and working towards a more sustainable future

Raising awareness of what has been before through interpretation, history, and education

Extending opportunities to learn about Epping Forest's heritage

Each of these aims is explored in further detail in the remainder of this section.



### 3.1 Re-establishing traditional forest management through grazing and pollarding

One way in which this aim has been met is through a significant package of arborist work. The veteran pollard trees at the forest are an integral part of its history, and these have been cared for as a part of the project.

Managing the trees included basic work to identify and record the basic condition of '**keystone**' trees – these are the ones really important for wildlife, so that they can be protected. A six-year cycle of condition checking by volunteer tree wardens has now been established, a system of random stratified species surveys and individual tree management plans to maintain this work into the future.

The practical tree conservation work programme was carried out on 1050 trees and included accelerated remedial interventions such as **repollarding and crown retrenchment pruning**. New equipment (Taupen Hi-Lift & Timberwolf chipper) was purchased to allow conservation work to be undertaken more efficiently.

This went extremely well, and there is major change to be seen in the areas where trees have been worked on. Due to the work carried out on the trees, they are expected to last another 300+ years and are a major part of the Branching Out Project legacy.

As well as improving the condition of the trees, the arborist work helped a number of young people through the apprentice scheme (see appendix 7 for apprentice survey summary), in which **arborist apprentices** were employed to learn a plethora of new skills and contribute to the preservation of veteran trees. The Conservators of Epping Forest worked with Capel Manor College to shape and develop their apprenticeship scheme as part of the employer's forum. 15 apprentices were employed across the 5 years, and they were supported to complete the NVQ Level 2 Trees and Timber qualification. The apprentices carried out such activities as climbing, felling and pruning and operating machinery such as tractors, chippers, grinders and four-wheel drive trucks.

One of the apprentices participated in a survey on his time working at the forest (see appendix 7 for full summary), and he said that the



*Figure 3: A photograph of a veteran tree at High Beach within Epping Forest*

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*"The trees are going to outlive us all so that will be the legacy. They will live another 300 hundred years. Far greater than any of us."*

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-Gavin Bodenham, Arborist



apprenticeship completely met his expectations and allowed him to discover new personal depths he didn't know he was able to reach. The confidence he gained from the apprenticeship stays with him to this day and he is still working in the field. A large number of those who worked as arborist apprentices are still working in the field, in the UK and further afield.

Another way in which this aim was delivered is through devising a **long-term grazing strategy** including; installing cattle grids/fencing to permit an increase of herd size to re-establish grazing over a wider Forest area and over a longer grazing season. Putting in place cattle grazing in Epping Forest has included using pioneering methods of invisible electric fencing.

71 linear meters of Epping Forest archive heritage have been catalogued and conserved as a result of the project, see section 3.3 for further details



Figure 4: Photograph showing a cattle grid and associated sign within the Forest

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*"The grazing on the forest has been a major achievement. I am very proud; given the scale of the public concern we saw. The frame work and infrastructure has been a major step change for the forest workers. The keystone trees and the arborist team were a major success. We continue to maintain the trees with the trained arborist staff."*

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-Jeremy Dagley, Head of Conservation

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*"The conservation sections of the project are a showcase of excellent conservation management, serving as an example to other conversations. The work that was carried out was a little bit of a step change for the organisation; now more than previously, we encourage conversation between the different learning providers and departments. This new approach is now normal in our organisation; the project gave this area a significant boost."*

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-Sophie Lillington, Forest Centres Officer (Heritage)



### 3.2 Improving access for all and ensuring a sustainable future

The design of the project has meant that it has delivered an **improved welcome** (in its broadest possible sense) through investment in basic infrastructure. This represents a tangible improvement in access for all audience groups.

The Forest, separated by the road network, has been re-connected through the development of 20 gateways to the Forest. It is perhaps symbolic that the threshold signage (pictured right) at these gateways welcoming visitors and residents into the Forest is being installed at the end of the project; signalling the start of a change in attitudes and perceptions of Epping Forest and the way in which people are involved with both creating and telling its long and ever-evolving story.

New signs and displays were commissioned across the forest and in the buildings to make it easier to navigate, and as an interpretation of the history of the forest.

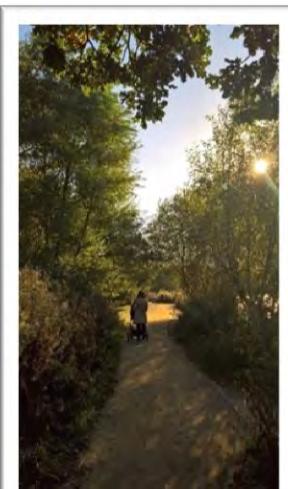
In addition to this, a free bus service for a limited period was put in place to bring visitors to and from the forest. This decreased the numbers of cars entering the site and provided alternative transport for people who may not have access to a car. Car park areas were rationalised and some upgraded both in terms of landscaping and visitor information and welcome (see 3.3). This work has paved the way for the development and revision of an **integrated Forest Transport Strategy** for the Forest.

In addition to the improved provision for welcome and orientation in the Forest, the project has also developed 9 **waymarked trails** (against a target of 6) that are encouraging visitors to explore the Forest further. Two of these are easy access water-side trails at Jubilee Pond and Connaught Water (pictured right) which have provided nearly 2km of enjoyable access to nature for all audiences, especially those with mobility issues or young families with buggies. In addition the project developed facilities for groups with specific access requirements, for example fishing platforms for disabled anglers.

An Easy Access Forum of users was created to help input into the project and this helped to guide the access improvements in a more participative way than had been previously in place.



*Figure 5: Photograph showing an example of the new and improved welcome signage which is in place throughout the forest*



*Figure 6: Photograph of a visitor to the forest walking on a new easily accessible path at Connaught Water*



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### 3.3 Raising awareness of what has been before through interpretation, history and education

The project set out to develop a ‘striking interpretive campus’ centred around Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge and the new ‘View’ centre (including Chingford Plain and Barn Hoppit). This achieved an 82% VisitEngland Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme (VAQAS) score in 2015 with staff, cleanliness, toilets, catering and first impressions all scoring highly<sup>2</sup>. The assessor in particular commented on the ‘excellent welcome received from knowledgeable Epping Forest staff at both sites’; ‘stunning views and attractive interesting buildings’ and ‘excellent food quality standards at Butler’s Retreat’.

The Branching Out project has enabled resources to be invested into four ‘honey pot’ sites at the Forest and created the opportunity to reinterpret the heritage of the Forest. A new departmental identity has been applied to all interpretation panels to help foster a sense of place across all City of London Corporation open spaces.

One participant in the key project members’ interviews also commented that the visitor centre and other new or redeveloped buildings made the forest as a whole feel more inviting and accessible to visitors. This is likely to have attracted members of the community who may not have visited the forest before. This makes history and information easily accessible for all in the community, and makes the forest a more visitor centred setting.

The new interpretation will play a key role going forward in raising awareness of the Forest and its heritage as well as challenging previously held perceptions of it.



Figure 7: Photograph of the new retail offer at The View

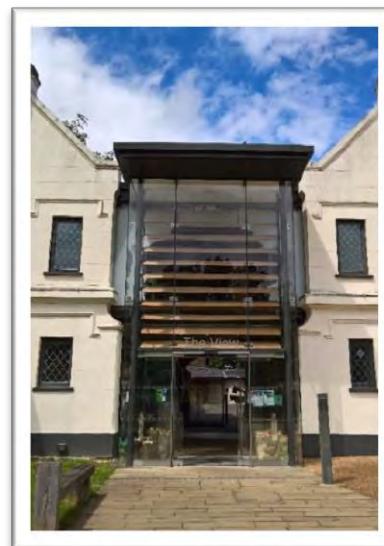


Figure 8: Photograph of the front exterior of the new visitor centre, The View

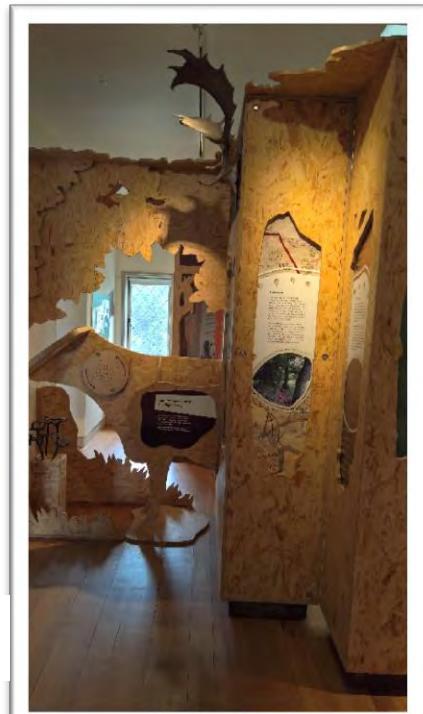


Figure 9: Photograph showing new interpretation within The View

<sup>2</sup> Overall The View, Queen Elizabeth’s Hunting Lodge and The Temple scored 173 marks out of a possible 201.



As mentioned in section 3.1, 71 linear meters of Epping Forest archive heritage have been catalogued and conserved as a result of the project. The archive work has been a huge success. It was completed in partnership with London Metropolitan Archive with whom the team now have a good working relationship. Ehive cataloguing has now begun which will enable digital access to the archives.

### 3.4 Extending opportunities to learn about Epping Forests heritage

The Branching Out project delivered a school programme consisting of **12,150 learning experiences** for key stage two pupils across the project, **25 schools visiting per year** and **33 individual schools visiting across three years**.

Schools are often at the heart of a community, and by allowing pupils to become ‘forest guardians’, the forest is sure to be enjoyed by generations to come in the communities local to the forest. See appendix 3 for a teacher interview script and appendix 8 for the interview responses.

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*“I thought it was fantastic project, I’ve been lucky to be involved on the management of several projects reaching 4,000 learners who often have limited possibility to reach the forest. It’s being told it was ‘one of the best days of my life’ that makes me certain about what we’re doing here.”*

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– Anneke Kempton, Field Studies Council

In addition the project has also provided a large number of apprenticeships and opportunities for staff and volunteers to learn through training. See section 4 for further details.

### 3.5 Key themes across the project

The evaluation has found a number of key themes that have spanned the project.

#### High quality of work and level of innovation

The high quality of work and level of innovation have been demonstrated not only in the outputs and improvements made to the forest, but the work quality has also been recognised with the following awards and gradings:

- VAQAS assessment
- Green Heritage award
- Green Flag award
- Green Tourism Gold standard award



Figure 10: Photograph of the Green Tourism Award won due to improvements made to the forest



Another example of the quality of work achieved is demonstrated in the scientific and practical conservation aspects of the project. There are a number of papers which have been published demonstrating the effects of the natural heritage conservation work undertaken, for example:

- Dagley, J., Beecroft, R., Vandermarcq, B., Hartup, M. (2014). The invisible fence project. *Conservation Land Management*. 12 (2), 14-19.
- Dagley, J., Hartup, M., Phillips, J., Adler, J. (2016). *Invisible Fencing Best Practice Guide*.
- Dagley, J. (2006). 'Pollarding in Epping Forest.' *1<sup>st</sup> colloque européen sur les trognes*. Vendome, France.<sup>3</sup>
- Dagley, J., Warnock, B. and Read, H., 2001. Managing veteran trees in historic open places. The Corporation of London's perspective. *Tools for preserving woodland biodiversity. NACONEX textbook*, 2, pp.32-36.
- Dagley, J, (2010). Promoting the Conservation of Ancient Oaks *Quercus Robur* in Epping Forest, UK . *In The Oak - Ecology, History, Management, and Planning II*. Isparta, Turkey, 01-03 June 2010. London: City of London Corporation, UK (Open Spaces Department, Epping Forest Division. 74-75.
- Helen J. Read , Jeremy Dagley , Jose Miguel Elosegui , Alvaro Sicilia &C. P. Wheater (2013): Restoration of lapsed beech pollards: Evaluation of techniques and guidance for future work, Arboricultural Journal: The International Journal of Urban Forestry.<sup>4</sup>
- Dagley, J., and Wilde, I., 2015. 'Let there be Light! Response of saproxylic beetle fauna to wood-pasture restoration management in Epping Forest, UK between 2003-2010.' *Symposium on the conservation of saproxylic beetles*. London.<sup>5</sup>
- Dagley, J., Froud, A. 2012. 'Seeing the trees within the wood: Managing ancient and veteran beech pollards in Epping Forest's wood-pasture' *2012: Trees beyond the wood conference*, Conservators of Epping Forest, City of London Corporation, pp. 115-123.<sup>6</sup>
- Monck, G., 2011. 'A study of the effects on vigour and lower epicormics growth of shading and different percentages of foliated crown removal on veteran and ancient pedunculated oak (*Querus robur L.*) lapsed pollards at Lords Bushes- Epping Forest and Hatfield Forest.' Master of Science thesis, Imperial College London, London,<sup>7</sup>

### Step-change as an organisation

<sup>3</sup> This paper and the three that follow were delivered at scientific conferences or workshops.

<sup>4</sup> Peer reviewed. This paper is directly related to the HLF work at the project as crown reduction techniques were being tested and compared on Beech ahead of the keystone Beech work carried out for Branching Out.

<sup>5</sup> This paper was delivered at a scientific conference in Basel, Switzerland, but has not yet been to scientific publication

<sup>6</sup> This paper was delivered at a conference, and is a forerunner for a scientific paper on Beech

<sup>7</sup> This paper will form the basis for a paper on Oak by Geoff Monck, Andy Froud, and Jeremy Dagley



The development of the project itself radically challenged the work of the City of London Corporation at Epping Forest<sup>8</sup>. The project helped to set new and challenging objectives for the organisation's work in this area. In particular this signalled the start of a more **integrated approach** to cross departmental and partnership working.

For example, members of the project were asked how effective they thought internal communication had been within the context of the project, (see appendix 5 for summary of interviews) and the majority felt that the level of communication had been good. Timely information was circulated to all involved with the project with the use of the web, newsletters and magazines and updates were presented to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) on a quarterly basis.

Planning and delivery of the project has helped the Forest team and individuals to **gain confidence** in tackling a large capital project. Perhaps most importantly, the project helped the team to **reconnect with the original purpose** of their work.

Finally, as a result in large part due to the Branching Out project, the running of the Forest is becoming more responsive to the local community and the needs of the varied visitor groups. The organisation is developing a more **visitor and community centred culture**. For example the provision of waymarked, promoted trails is a change in approach for the City of London Corporation in Epping Forest from assuming it is the visitor's responsibility to find their way around to providing information to facilitate a visit.

Evaluation tools including visitor and key project member surveys allowed insight to be gained into how well the project was going and what could be improved further. This was successful and a variety of different people were able to input their thoughts and ideas into the project for consideration. The visitor survey results demonstrated the way visitors rated organisational activities, and these can be seen in figure 19, below. (See appendix 4 for summary)



*Figure 11: Bar chart demonstrating visitor ratings of organisational activities taken from the 2014 visitor survey*

<sup>8</sup> Taken from the Executive summary to Stage 2 HLF bid.



The project has also helped the City of London Corporation to develop a more participative approach to planning and delivery. The Community Liaison Officer role created by the project was key in facilitating this. The following diagram shows the ladder of participation<sup>9</sup> on which the project worked at different levels during its development and delivery phase. The Conservators of Epping Forest now have the opportunity to mindfully consider on which level they would like to engage communities for future projects.

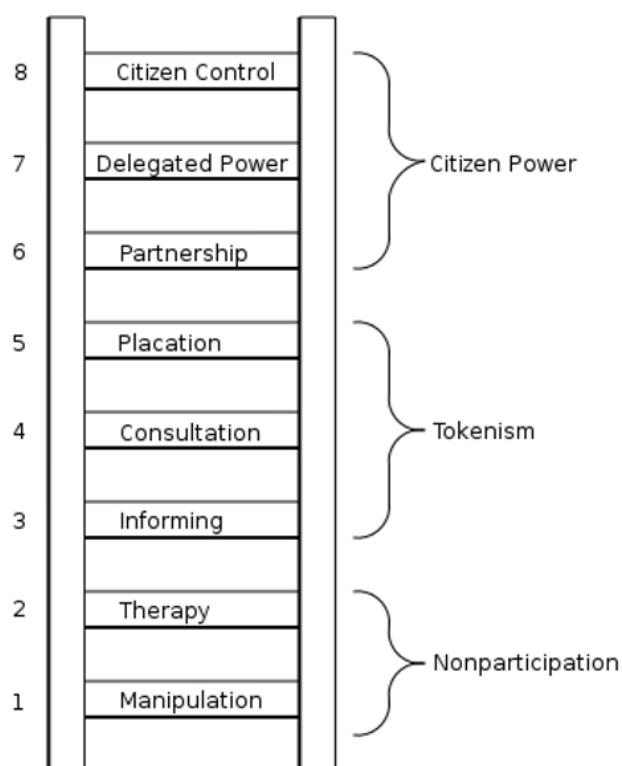


Figure 12 Ladder of participation, After Arnstein

<sup>9</sup> Arnstein's Ladder of Participation. Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A Ladder of Participation. *Journal of American Institute of Planners*. See Appendix 9 for explanation of model.

## 4. Who benefitted from the project?

The Branching Out project aimed to reach a range of stakeholders and audience groups. The main beneficiary groups are explored in this section. In particular, the project helped to deepen engagement with many audiences, moving them up the scale of engagement shown below. For example, at the most basic level the new threshold signage can move people from 0 to 1 on the below scale simply by making them aware that they are entering Epping Forest which they may not have been aware of previously.

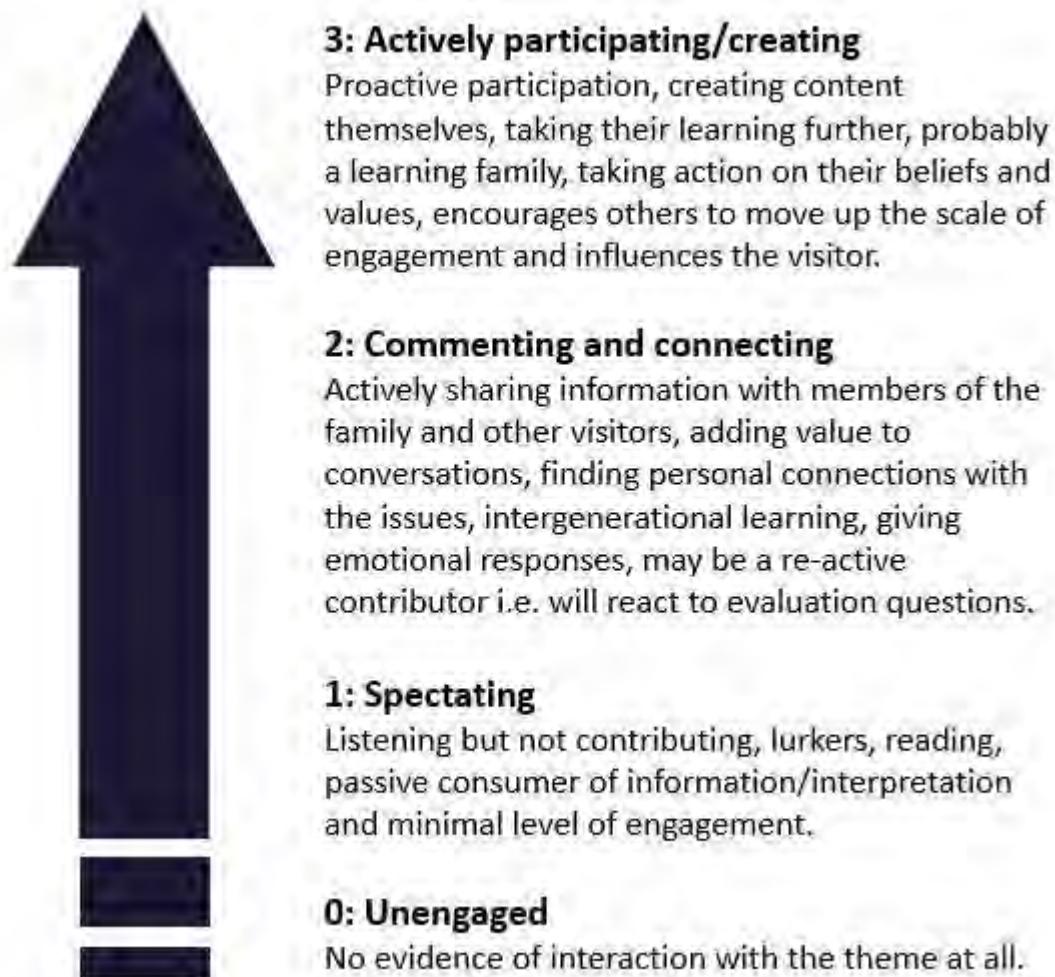


Figure 13 Scale of engagement for interactions with heritage, after Measures.

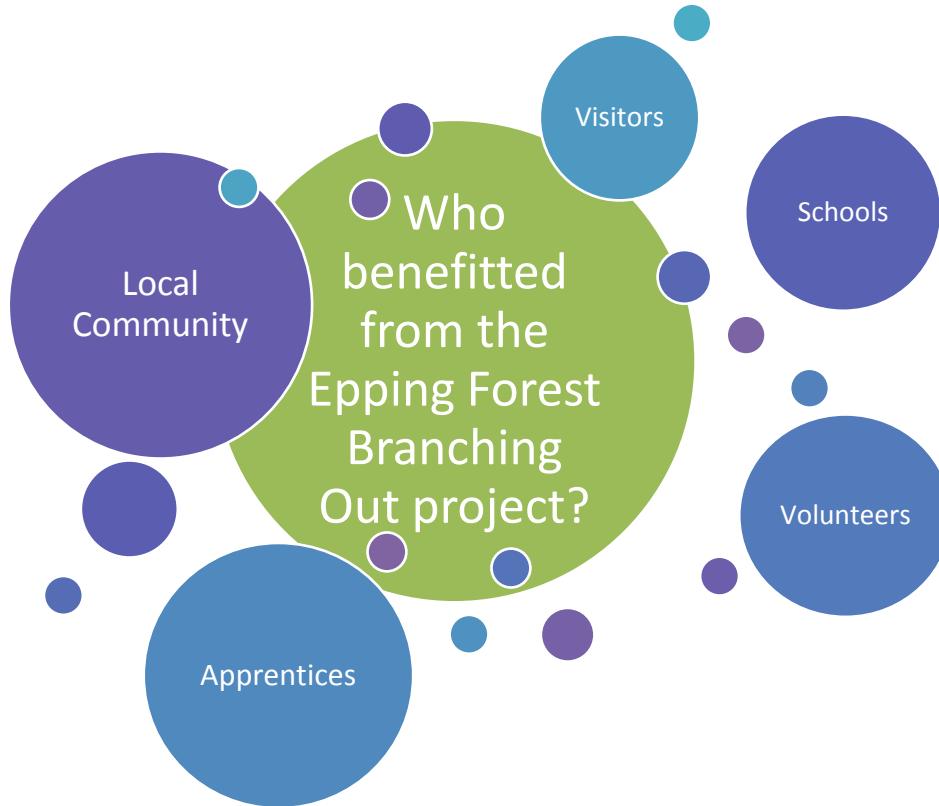


Figure 14 Diagram showing the main beneficiary groups for the Branching Out project.

### Visitors

Visitors to Epping Forest are a key beneficiary of aims 2, 3 and 4 for the Branching Out project. Section 3 of this report illustrates some of these benefits in more detail.

It is evident that numbers of visitors to the forest increased due to the project. During the summer of 2014, volunteers and staff mapped the location of 2560 visits across ten sites around the Forest. Surveyors followed a set route and plotted visitor location and demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and activity. Eight surveys, each approximately an hour long, were carried out to provide this data occurring both at weekends and on weekdays. The statistics were used to work out an estimated number of annual visits per site, and the estimated annual number of visitors following the project is 4,271,398. This visitor count also showed that the range of visitors had grown, with an increase in visitors from black and ethnic minority communities. This shows that learning opportunities are being provided to those who may not previously have had them. As well as increasing opportunities for those from ethnic minority communities, work has been carried out to make the Forest more accessible for visitors with special educational needs, particularly in a school environment, and physical disabilities, with four dedicated easy access routes being implemented. See appendix 4 for visitor survey summary.



Families in particular have benefited from the development of two low impact natural play areas at Connaught Water and Jubilee Ponds and the easy access paths at these sites.

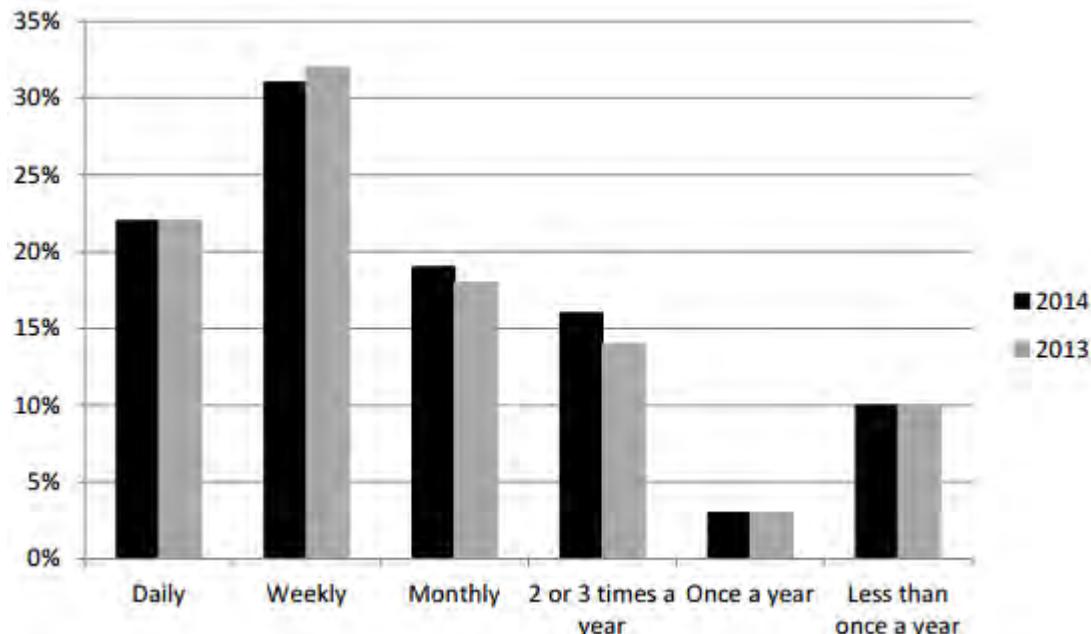


Figure 15: Bar chart demonstrating frequency of forest visits, taken from Epping Forest visitor survey 2014

*"The forest benefitted from an increased footfall, this number was demonstrated by evaluation reports and visitor group surveys in various areas of the forest. Extra projects were running, for example, the shuttle bus service, this supported an increased visitor rate to the exhibition and café and with its improved facilities, dwell time increased."*

-Catherine Cavanagh, Contracted project manager

The project has helped to influence key metrics for visitors such as frequency of visit and dwell time.

### Schools

The Branching Out project has helped to refine the Epping Forest education programme. The Discovering Epping Forest project was an innovative programme which brought together four learning providers local to Epping Forest.

A key element to this was that pupils and teachers at these schools visited the Forest multiple times during an annual programme that spanned three years.

Many of the children at participating schools were not

*"My day was fantastic and adventurous."*

- Pupil, module one, City of London DEF report



regular visitors to the Forest, and may not have visited the forest at all without being a part of the programme. This resulted in children returning to the forest with their families, who similarly may not have visited the forest before, with the children taking ownership of the forest and being proud to show their families around. All of the children involved were able to increase their knowledge and understanding of the heritage, history, ecology, and conservation of Epping Forest. Pupils also reaped the benefits of learning outside of the classroom in a natural environment and were able to increase their confidence in visiting open spaces independently of the project.

The project was delivered across six modules, with pupils involved carrying out comparative activities at the end of the sixth module. This involved pupils drawing mind maps at the start of each year on pieces of paper with the word 'Forest' in the centre, and then writing words they associated with the forest on the piece of paper. Pupils would be given another piece of paper with the word 'Forest' on it at the end of the year, and asked to write words they associated with a forest now. The two mind maps were compared, and it became evident just how much school pupils had learnt and benefitted from the programme at Epping Forest. Some of the pupils, at the start of the year, would write three or four words on the mind map such as 'mud' and 'tree', but at the end they would fill a whole page with words.

An outreach programme was also developed in which representatives from the forest were able to go to schools who could not visit the forest and educate them in a location convenient to them. The project aimed to benefit pupils at schools in deprived areas, however some of the schools in the most deprived areas were unable to finance days at Epping Forest. The outreach programme ensured that this was not a barrier to children learning about their local environment.

In total, 2,025 pupils participated in the project, with 12,150 learner experiences taking place over three years. Pupil satisfaction was high at over 63%<sup>10</sup> across all project modules. See DEF report for more information.

See appendix 3 for teacher interview script and appendix 8 for interview responses.

<sup>10</sup> N=2,025 pupils



## Apprentices

A number of arborist apprentices were taken on to aid the existing arborists in the upkeep of the veteran trees in the forest. Apprentices were taught a variety of practical skills, which included

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*"Educating our apprentices was an excellent achievement. A large number are still working in the industry, home and abroad. One particularly is now working in Canada."*

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– Gavin Bodenham, Arborist

maintenance skills such as operating the chipper and chainsaw, and climbing skills which included rope techniques. In addition to this, apprentices learnt operation of heavy machinery, and knowledge about trees and timber concerning tree function and their importance to the environment. Apprentices also enhanced personal skills such as communication or team working skills. Upon completion of the apprenticeship, one apprentice gained employment with the Conservators of Epping Forest before moving to Epping Forest District Council as Tree Inspector. Others moved elsewhere to work including one apprentice joining a small firm and securing the role of Lead Climber and one apprentice gaining employment as an arborist in Canada. See appendix 7 for a summary of apprentice interview.

## Volunteers

The Branching Out project helped the City of London Corporation in Epping Forest to establish robust policies and systems to run a volunteer programme. The programme is one of the legacies of the project, and volunteers have been placed into a plethora of roles in different locations. Prior to the project there were just a few volunteers in place at the Hunting Lodge, but the project incited a renewed programme of volunteering. This is not only beneficial for the maintenance and care of the Forest, it also benefits members of the local community who have had the opportunity to adopt a volunteering role and gain a wide range of new skills and taken part in a host of new experiences.

A total of 26 volunteers were recruited during 2013/14, and they performed a variety of roles which included litter picking and visitor services. Since April 2014, a further 15 volunteers have been recruited. The Epping Forest volunteers completed 10,884 volunteer hours in 2013/14. The Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers completed a further 4,707 hours, and the Epping Forest Centenary Trust volunteers completed 5,595 hours, making a total of 21,186 volunteer hours. Which is a 2.07% increase on 2012/2013.



## Local communities

The central reason for the redevelopment of the Forest was to improve it for visitors, and a large majority of visitors to the forest are members of communities local to the forest. Measures to trial increased accessibility were put in place, for example a free bus service was run for a limited period to limit the number of people using cars to access the Forest. Investment into 'honeypot' areas of the forest such as visitor centre The View made the whole forest appear more welcoming and accessible to visitors, and allowed them to gain insight into the history of the Forest and information from the archives. The whole project improved the forest and made it more accessible for local communities.

The project also meant that more events were arranged which those living local to the forest could enjoy, including Forest introduction events such as 'meet the arborists' and 'meet the cattle'. See figure sixteen for a breakdown of event attendees from 2012-2014.

*"People who lived 15 minutes from the forest came for their first time. We changed views and perceptions of the forest. For example, a young lad of 15 years, he arrived with his socks tucked in his trousers, hoodie wrapped around his face, when asked he answered that he was scared of grasshoppers, this was an impactful and memorable time. He learnt about grasshoppers and by the end was running, chasing and catching them."*

- Alison Tapply, Epping Forest Keeper, City of London staff

Event type	Number of participants		
	2012	2013	2014
Events from Events Diary	13,090	13,651	13,924
Visits to the Field Studies Centre	22,141	22,304	18,470
Visits to Suntrap	12,794	12,766	12,350
Events led by the Centenary Trust	3,358	1,508	13,084
Discovering Epping Forest sessions (project ended in 2012)	4,500	0	0
Family Learning Events (nine events a year)	3,011	3,514	1,892
Visits to the Chingford Hub	36,573*	73,762	69,106
Visits to the Epping High Beach Visitor Centre ▲	19,702	10,255	10,412
Visits to The Temple	10,906	10,037	10,319
HLF Forest Introduction Events (minimum of 12 events a year)	692	360	518
Visits to Chingford Golf Course	26,629	21,408	22,498
Football (pitch numbers reduced in 2012)	65,604	68,245	52,890▲
Additional sport on Wanstead Flats △	0	0	10,928
Web sessions	18,801	113,774	148,873
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>201,228</b>	<b>351,584</b>	<b>332,374</b>

\* The View visitor centre closed for 6 months in 2012 for redevelopment

▲ Visitor Centre hours reduced to weekends only in 2013

▲ Eight weeks of pitch bookings had to be cancelled due to waterlogging of the pitches

△ Includes school sports days, rounders, archery, health walks and cross country running events

Figure 16: Table showing observations data about number of participants to events at the forest from 2012-2014



## Mini case study – Orion Harriers Running Club

Tim Wright is chair of the Orion Harriers Running Club and participated in an interview on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2016.

The expanded visitor centre proposed by the Branching Out Project needed the space occupied by the running club. The club was given alternative accommodation was found in a nearby former clubroom and sports changing room known as Jubilee Retreat. The Club shared premises with a local cricket club while, in partnership with the City, raised the money to transform the abandoned building into a clubhouse and given a peppercorn rent rate for three years by the City of London Corporation.

### **How has the Branching Out project positively impacted the club?**

Once work has been carried out on the club's new premises, including an extension, the club will be in a better position than they were prior to the project beginning, although it has taken longer than expected for the club to reach this position. The new accessible trails have also opened up more areas for the club to use within Epping Forest.

Epping Forest have worked to build relationships with local community groups in order to bring a new, more diverse range of visitors into the forest, and stronger links have been established with the running club during the project, however they did use Epping Forest prior to the project taking place.

### **Where has the project excelled?**

Tim comments on the fact that the Forest is open access as being a brilliant feature of the project, but would like to see more signage. He also feels that the interpretation boards have been an area where the project has excelled, but similarly to the signage, would like to see more of them. The visitor centre has been mentioned by Tim as the greatest success of the project.

### **Where has the project met challenges?**

Tim feels that more work needs to be done to continue the development and improvements to the forest. This includes adding more history to the visitor centre, making more of it accessible online, and improving the frequency of forest signage and interpretation boards, as well as improving the transport strategy.

### **Epping Forest and the community**

When asked about the future of the project, Tim comments on the levels of outreach with the community, stating that he would like to see the continuation of the community engagement programme so as to allow local groups to really make the most of the Forest.



## 5. Lessons learnt and recommendations

The summative evaluation process has helped to highlight a number of lessons learnt during the delivery of the Branching Out project.

### 5.1 Making the most of the legacy

As previously discussed, the project has generated a significant and valued legacy. This needs to be actively maintained if the impact of the investment in the project in future years is to be realised. A legacy plan has been developed, see section 6.

Resources and plans created by the project need to adapt and change if they are to continue to meet the needs of visitors and the local community, as well as ensure long term sustainability. For example whilst the spaces within The View visitor centre are a transformational addition to the visitor experience at Epping Forest, they are not flexible enough to accommodate a broad range of uses possible in a building that is to become a community resource. For example, whilst there is a temporary changing gallery space it is small and the rest of the interpretation is static and permanent. This means that the spaces are not flexible enough to accommodate weddings or community events.

The end of the Branching Out project also provides a prime opportunity to spread the learning and improvement achieved during its delivery wider across the Forest. For example, The View, Hunting Lodge and Butler's Retreat received an excellent VAQAs rating however the VAQAs rating for a visit to the wider Forest was considerably lower<sup>11</sup> and highlighted areas for improvement.

885 questionnaire surveys were completed in 2014 by members of the public<sup>12</sup> who visited the Forest. This provides a useful source of information when considering how the legacy should be managed and where visitors would like to see improvement. The surveys collected data on forest visitor demographics, such as where they lived and what distance from the forest, as well as data on the forest experience such as how visitors rate 'travelling along paths' (see figure 18). One of the questions asked 'what would encourage you to return to the Forest?'

Respondents could tick up to three answers, and a third of all respondents were happy with the forest the way it was when they took the survey in 2014. The rest of the responses are presented in

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*"Encouraging locals to take ownership of the space, make further use of grounds, possibly festivals, etc."*

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-Renae Cronin, General Manager at Codsteaks on what the community potential for The View is in the future.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that the assessment was undertaken before some of the welcome hub and threshold furniture had been installed.

<sup>12</sup> The surveys could be completed online or at Forest centres, or were collected from face-to-face interviews by staff and volunteers in the summer.



the graph below (figure 17) – it is evident that the second most popular response was that people wanted more events, followed by more seats and more refreshment facilities. See visitor survey report 2014 and summary of findings in appendix 4.

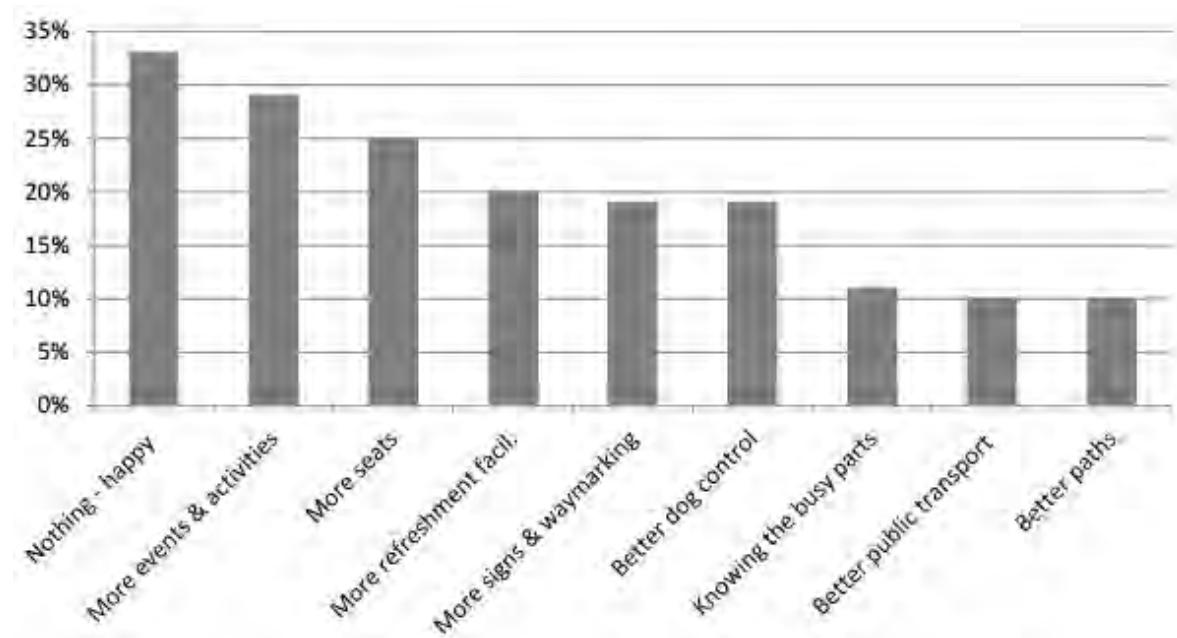


Figure 17: Bar chart demonstrating answers to the question 'What would encourage you to return to the Forest?' Taken from Epping Forest visitor survey report

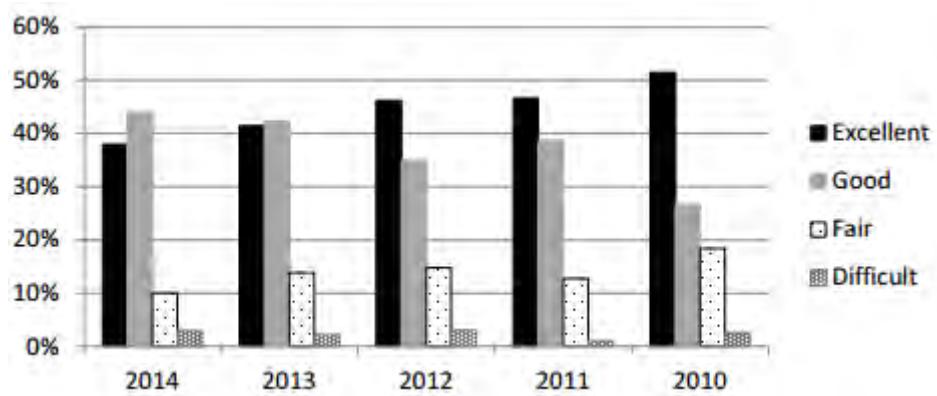


Figure 18: Bar chart demonstrating how visitors rate 'travelling along paths' taken from the Epping Forest visitor survey 2014

The desire for more events and activities is echoed in the key project members' interviews (see appendix 5), where one participant said that it is important for the local community to take ownership of the forest, and this could be done through holding festivals and similar events.



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## 5.2 Create capacity for change

Key members of the project were asked about barriers which still exist to taking the work further, and a frequent answer was that in the future, more funding and dedicated resource would be necessary to continue to innovate in these work areas. Stakeholders gave practical examples of where additional funding could help remove barriers to engagement or conservation work. For example, additional funding could help schools who could not afford to self-fund visits to the Forest or enable the education team to be able to provide the more immersive, engaging multiple visit engagements for local schools provided within the Branching Out project.

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*"A resource barrier, the staff and money to keep things going"*

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- Catherine Cavanagh, Contracted Project Manager

**Alternative delivery models** could also assist with creating capacity for improvement. The Discovering Epping Forest schools project is an excellent example of working with specialist partners within the Forest to achieve shared educational objectives.

In addition to managing the legacy City of London Corporation has the opportunity to use it as a **springboard to take more calculated risks and create smaller revenue projects** around some of the areas of work. This could help to provide the resource and 'space' to further innovate in these areas.

Having all members of staff and volunteers on board and mobilised is an asset for any heritage project. The challenge of how and to what extent to involve all staff and volunteers so that they feel ownership of the project and up to date with its progress is a perennial one. It is always a tricky balance to strike but delivery of good internal communications can create a motivated team all 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. An **internal communications plan** for future large scale projects could help to mobilise City Of London Corporation's people to a greater extent.

## 5.3 Continue to develop the model of working with communities

**Community involvement** is key to the long-term sustainability of the Forest and the work of the City of London Corporation within it. The Branching Out project is the tip of the iceberg in terms of what could be achieved with local communities in the Forest; London's largest green space. The Corporation now has the opportunity to move towards a more **holistic community model** involving meaningful participation. The ladder of participation (see section 3) can help the team to plan at which level each intervention or consultation should sit. This process should also take into consideration striking the right balance between people and community focussed work and conservation work within the Forest. Consultative and community committees already in place have an important role to play, but are only part of the solution.



In particular, the Community Engagement Officer post in place for part of the project helped to provide specialist skills, capacity and a focus for this work. Once the post became vacant it was not re-filled. An organisation of this size and scope needs Community Engagement capacity to enable proper and meaningful participation and consultation in the management of the shared natural and cultural heritage. The original individual in this post has now secured the role of Forest Keeper so the skills developed within the project have been retained within the organisation however the distinct Community Engagement Officer role and capacity does not now exist.

## 5.4 Effective project planning

The project team learnt a number of **practical lessons about planning** and delivering a multi-faceted ambitious project of this nature.

For example, adequate time for capital build works was not allowed for within planning and the timing for the construction works took 12 months longer than initially planned. There were additional challenges for construction works, for example a lack of storage built into the restaurant facilities at the Butler's Retreat and the location of site staff during construction works needs to be carefully considered for future projects.

In addition the procurement of items such as interpretation could be undertaken in a SMARTer way to allow more lead time, time for user testing and flexibility in the designs and finished product.

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*"The staff were relocated on site during the construction works, with hindsight they didn't necessarily need to be on site. It was an impediment during the works. The staff could have been rehoused in their office on a temporary basis that wasn't so close to the building."*

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- Nicholas Sommerville, Architect with the City of London surveyor's department

## 5.5 Use the summative evaluation as a communication opportunity

If an organisation is to get best value from a project evaluation, it can use the information gathered for **evidence-based advocacy**. Advocacy is the deliberate process, based on demonstrated evidence, to directly and indirectly influence decision makers, stakeholders and relevant audiences to support and implement actions that contribute to attaining the project vision.

In addition to an evaluation report, a programme of evidence based advocacy should be considered to use to disseminate the messages of the project. This also links to how the partnership will share its learning wider across the sector.

In the short-term the project team could create internal and external advocacy tools based upon the summative evaluation and legacy plan and use these to communicate the lessons learnt more widely.

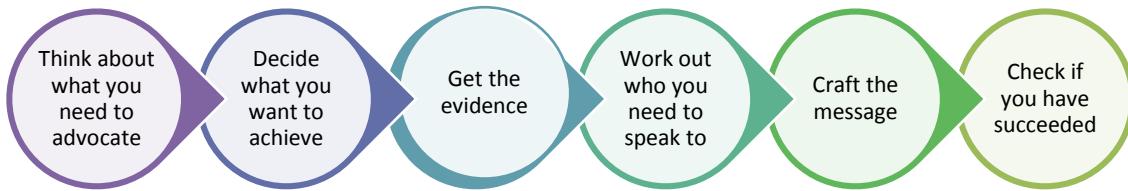


Figure 19 Diagram to show the steps to planning evidence based advocacy

## 5.6 Foster a culture of evaluation and research

Monitoring and evaluation are particularly important for a project such as Branching Out because it plans to do ground-breaking, game changing work that if successful could deliver a raft of new impacts and create a new way of working for the future. The project has also created the opportunity to build upon the insight generated by activities such as the visitor survey.

It is therefore important to properly understand what works and what doesn't about this approach and the extent of the impacts across the outcome areas. This will enable evidence based decision making about similar programmes in the future.

Monitoring and evaluating has many benefits including:

- ✓ Ensure quality of delivery and programme against its outputs
- ✓ Understand the impacts and beneficiaries of the project
- ✓ Help **meet funder requirements**
- ✓ Determine if a projects aims, objectives and outcomes are being or have been met
- ✓ Enable us to **understand visitors/users** or non-visitors/non-users better (being more user-focused) and improve the activities we offer them
- ✓ Identify **strengths and weaknesses** (and where resources should be directed in future)
- ✓ As a **professional development** tool and for **action learning**
- ✓ Ensure that **learning is shared and acted upon** within the organisation
- ✓ Define the quality of what is done and can **highlight unexpected outcomes** and seemingly 'intangible' outcomes
- ✓ **Anticipate problems** that can be resolved early on
- ✓ Strengthen accountability and **motivate staff** and users
- ✓ **Demonstrate to funders** the impact of the organisation
- ✓ Help inform the **legacy**
- ✓ Be a tool for **evidence-based advocacy** and **leverage of funding** and support.

For every day work, this might include a **capacity building programme** to develop the Corporations team for example in practical evaluation skills or evidence-based advocacy. Consideration by senior management to creating permanent capacity on the internal team for evaluation should also be



given and the possibility of further partnership with higher education institutions to undertake research should also be explored.

For future major projects, this should include the development of a **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework** during development of the project, running awareness training for the whole project team to ensure the importance of evaluation is embedded into the project delivery and the commissioning of external support to provide an independent perspective and add rigor to the process.

The evaluation of large scale projects should be treated with the same level of importance as the project activities and events. In future projects, evaluation should be considered as an integral part, with planning commencing from the inception of the project and responsibility being ascribed to those who will be organising and collecting data for evaluation. It should also have a dedicated budget. Evaluation serves a multitude of purposes, and continuous evaluation helps monitoring and checks whether the project strategy is heading in the right direction. It also helps to justify whether the project is value for money, and validates the funding decisions which have been made, along with decisions about research and to check that the project generally is moving along well and improving.

## 6. Next Steps

### 6.1 Project Legacy and actioning lessons learnt

City of London Corporation in Epping Forest are committed to progression. Whilst the Branching Out project made excellent inroads to achieving the vision of ‘innovative Open Space Management achieved through social inclusion, education and enjoyment’ there is still work to be done and this vision remains a guiding principle for the future.

To this end a Legacy document has been drafted, see Appendix 6 which documents outputs achieved by the project and how these will be built upon in the next ten years; 2017-2027. This document sets out targets for future outputs across all four aims of the project and mechanisms for measuring the success of these. Many of these respond not only to the foundation of work created during Branching Out but also to the lessons learnt by the organisation, see section 5.

This document states that aside from all the wonderful improvements to the facilities now on offer at Epping Forest, a large legacy from the Branching Out project is the lessons learned from delivering the project and how Epping Forest can continue to improve the offer to visitors, partners and volunteers.

The overall ‘step-change’ in the way the Forest and its visitors are managed has been realised and over the life of the project the Committee members, managers and officers who run the Forest have gained a better understanding of their visitors and how they can better deliver services to them. This improvement in information needed to make informed decisions stretches across the project from the visitor survey, to the survey and recording of keystone trees which will inform future tree management in the Forest. Leading on from this new or reviewed management frameworks have also been put into place as a result of the Branching Out project. For example, a robust volunteer programme including systems for recruitment and training is now in place that can be fostered and grown over future years. The Forest Transport Strategy now in place will guide development in this area of work in a considered way in the future.



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A big **thank you** to everyone who has assisted in the data collection for this evaluation report.



## 7. List of Appendices

1. Full list of evaluation material received
2. Telephone interview script for key project members
3. Telephone interview script for teachers
4. Epping Forest visitor survey summary
5. Key project member interview summary
6. Branching Out legacy 2017-2027
7. Apprentice survey summary
8. Teacher interview
9. Explanation of Arnstein's Ladder model of participation



## Appendix 1: Full list of evaluation material received

- Initial scoping meeting and informal focus group with Branching Out Project Manager and the Superintendent of Epping Forest
- Desk-based review of project documentation
- Review of reports including archive report and 2014 visitor survey data (2560 visits were mapped across ten sites throughout the forest in the summer of 2014. The surveyors followed a set route, plotting visitor location and other details such as age, gender, ethnicity and activity. **Eight surveys, each approximately an hour long**, were carried out on each site.)
- Discovering Epping Forest project report on primary school learning experiences in the forest. **12,150 learning experiences** for key stage two pupils across the project, **25 schools visiting per year and 33 across three years.**
- Fresh Eye visit to The View and Butlers Retreat
- Structured feedback from arborist apprentices (1 survey)
- Online survey of volunteering experience
- Telephone interview with teacher involved in Discover Epping Forest (1 teacher interview)
- Semi-structured telephone interviews with 10 key members of the project using a palette of questions



## Appendix 2: Telephone interview script for key project members

### **Telephone question framework – for key project staff, stakeholders and suppliers**

**Hi I'm Nikki and I am one of the evaluators for the Branching Out project.**

**Thank you for taking part in this telephone interview – it includes 12 questions and will take no longer than 20-25 minutes, is that ok?**

This is really an informal chat and a chance for us to get your thoughts on the project.

The information we gather will be fed into the final evaluation of the Branching Out project and help the organisation and others to learn from the project as well as report to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

We are not looking for just positive comments but an honest reflection on the journey of the project.

- 1. Just to give me some background could you outline your role in the project?**
  
- 2. Overall, how well has the project met your expectations?**

I want to ask you about how well you feel the project has achieved its vision of protecting Epping Forest and beyond and I am going to run through each of the areas in turn. Don't worry if you can't answer for all four areas of the vision.

Please tell us any areas that you feel have excelled or areas where challenges still exist.

**1. Extending opportunities to learn about Epping Forest's heritage**

Excelled -

Challenges –

**2. Raising awareness of what has been before through interpretation, history and education**

Excelled -

Challenges -

**3. Improving access for all and working towards a more sustainable future**

Excelled -



Challenges -

**4. Re-establishing traditional Forest management through grazing and pollarding**

Exceeded -

Challenges -

**5. What do you feel has been the greatest success of the project?**

**6. Who do you think has benefitted most from the project?** Eg particular audiences, communities, organisations

**7. And what do you feel are the greatest legacies of the Branching Out project?**

**Resources and Communication**

**8. Do you feel there has been sufficient budget, staff and support to complete the project to its greatest potential the project?** And if not, which areas in particular would additional resources have been valuable?

**9. How well do you think the project and team communicated, for example with colleagues, partners, volunteers, local communities and stakeholders?**

**Looking forward**

**10. Long term, what would you like to see happen with the work started by this project?**

**11. How do you feel this could be most effective achieved?**

**12. Where do you feel there are barriers that still exist to taking this work further?** E.g. funding, connecting with more diverse audiences, capacity, communicating with the right people

That is all the questions I have, is there anything else you would like to add about the project overall or your work within it?

**Thank you for your time today.** As I said this is all so useful and will feed into the final evaluation of the project.



## Appendix 3: Telephone interview script for teachers

### **Telephone question framework – for teachers in the Discover Epping Forest programme**

**Name of school:**

Hi I'm Nikki and I am one of the evaluators for the Branching Out project in Epping Forest. We have been given your number because I believe you participated in the Discovering Epping Forest programme where your school visited 6 times in a year?

**Thank you for taking part in this telephone interview – it includes 8 short questions and will take no longer than 10-15 minutes, is that ok?**

This is really an informal chat and a chance for us to get your thoughts on the programme and we'll send you a £10 M&S voucher to say thank you for your time.

The information we gather will be fed into the final evaluation of the Branching Out project and help the organisation and others to learn from the project as well as report to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

We are not looking for just positive comments but an honest reflection.

1. Can you start by telling me a bit about the visits you undertook to Epping Forest. When were the visits roughly?
2. Which year group were they with?
3. Were they self-guided (ie the teacher led them) or did a forest educator lead them (ie from Field Studies Corporation, Suntrap Education Centre)?
4. Did you undertake any training as part of the programme as well as visits?
5. If yes, can you tell me a bit about this and how do you feel it affected your confidence to lead out of the classroom sessions?
6. Overall, how well has the programme met your expectations?
7. What do you think the most important things the children/young people took away from the experience were?
8. Has anything happened as a result of the programme (in your school, a year group, to teachers or individual pupils)?

That is all the questions I have, is there anything else you would like to add about the programme?

**Thank you for your time today.** As I said this is all so useful and will feed into the final evaluation of the project.



## Appendix 4: Epping Forest visitor survey summary



### SUMMARY

We engaged Alison Millward Associates to devise a visitor survey for Epping Forest and train staff and volunteers in data gathering and analysis, with a tapered handover over four years. Funding was provided by Heritage Lottery via the Branching Out project and the City of London.

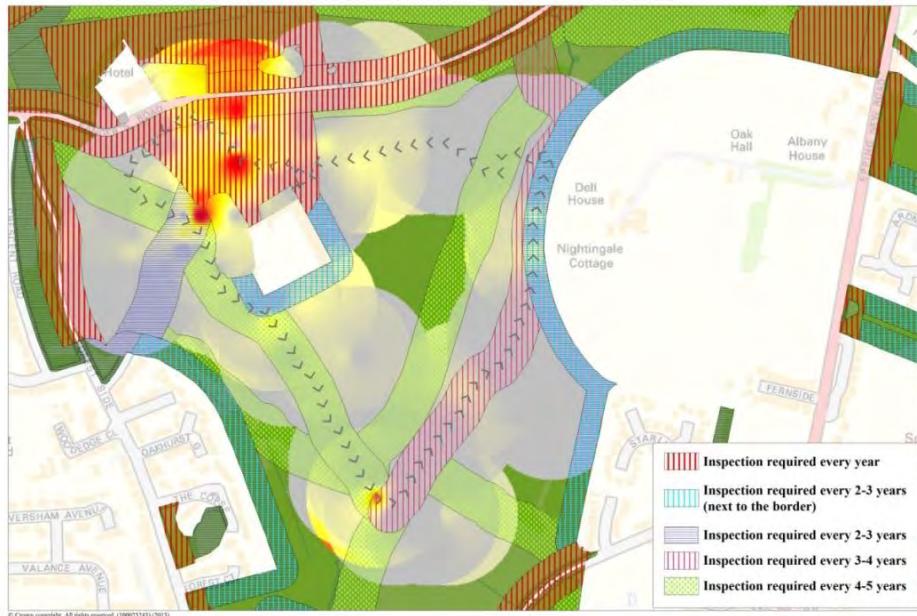
No method of counting visitors was previously used and it is thought that the Forest is too permeable (only Wanstead Park is fenced) for automated counters. The methodology for the survey is summarised in the 2010 report.

**Aim:** To calculate the annual number of visits made to Epping Forest; understand the main activities and provide a benchmark against which the success of access improvements to the Forest can be measured.

### RESULTS

We now know that Epping Forest receives over 4.2 million visits per annum and better understand our visitor demographic compared to the local community.

Our volunteers have taken over more of the survey work each year, and in 2014 mapped eight sites on the Forest, walking 120 miles over 60 hours and surveying 1,395 visitors. Volunteers spend a considerable amount of time (c30 hours) inputting data and we also benefit from the local knowledge volunteers have of the Forest when analysing results and making action plans.



### Barn Hoppitt: Visitor density mapping informs tree safety inspections

More questionnaire forms are now being completed than for the previous Greenstat survey. Volunteers not only did the majority of the surveys but also improved the reporting procedure, eg the formulae on the Excel spreadsheet.

*It was easy to drop in and pick up the system.*

Andrew Harby, Community Liaison Officer, maternity cover

## USES

### Management

Although not clearly articulated as an original aim, the survey data has contributed greatly to informed decision making. For example, survey data has been fed into the management plan process and information on popular dog walking areas has informed the grazing strategy.

The visitor survey highlights areas of concern. It helps identify the need for and location of future projects as well as prioritising maintenance works and resources. Action plans are used to inform operational plans and staff appraisals, to raise awareness about issues and make relevant improvements.

We are using GIS maps of the visitor densities to prioritise works to trees as part of our Tree Safety Zone review. The visitor survey is used to inform tender processes (eg catering) and contribute to other survey work (eg car parking and conservation management plans). We can focus activities such as litter picking on areas where the visitor impact is higher.

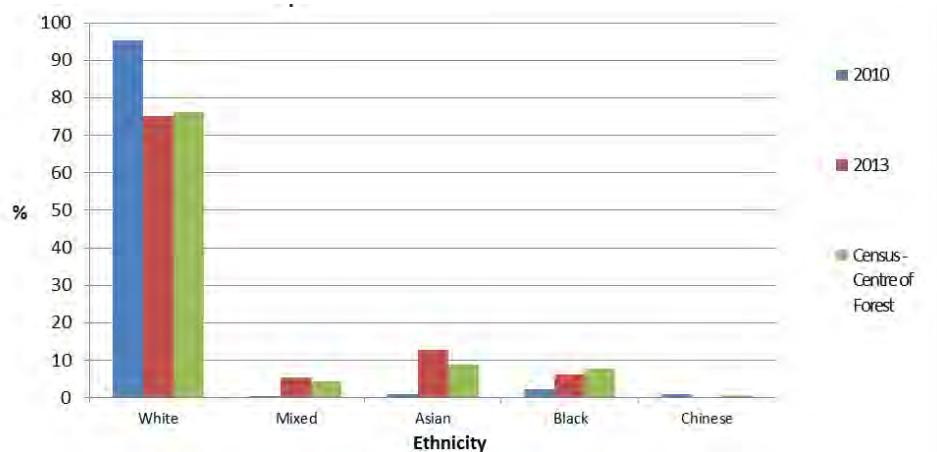


*It's good to know how the results are used to influence the management of the Forest – it makes it more rewarding.*

Rod Grossthan, Volunteer:

### Evaluation and bench marking

Baseline data is used to measure the impact of improvements, in particular as part of the five-year Branching Out project where sites were observed before and after capital works. It will play a key part in evaluating our forthcoming Management Plan.



**Connaught Water:** the ethnicity of visitors was observed as being closer to the 2011 Census following access improvement works.

The results from the questionnaires give us a better picture of how visitors view our services such as catering and events.

*The City of London is in a strong position to demonstrate that you can deliver change. The dramatic rise in use, greater diversity and appreciation of the improvements at Connaught Water are particularly pleasing to me.*

Alison Millward, Consultant

### Dissemination

The results of the Visitor Survey are posted on the City of London's [website](#). They are accompanied by reports on progress with action plans derived from the survey.

Statistics from the survey are included in talks to external groups, from local societies to livery companies, and as part of our walking events. They are used to report to sponsors (eg HLF and CBT) and our committees, as well as applications for awards and funding.



Visitor survey information is used in area-specific press releases, eg Jubilee Pond landscaping; to answer enquiries - especially contextualising complaints; influence partners (eg local authorities); and liaise with community groups/forums.

Alison Millward included the visitor survey as a case study in her presentation at the Countryside Management Association's *Getting it Right* seminar. An MSc student paper on applied micro-econometrics was based on the 2010 visitor survey. The conclusion noted that respondents engaging in activities such as keep fit are more likely to visit the Forest on a weekly basis.

## OUTCOMES

**Legacy:** More could be done to link observation data with sensitive habitats, biodiversity and wildlife. The GIS visitor density mapping for tree safety could also be used to assess soil damage from compaction and pollution.

The audience segmentation work by Visitor Services might link to the survey, although the former is for marketing whereas the survey is about increasing diversity.

Resources need to be set aside to continue coordinating and delivering an annual visitor survey. There is the potential for student involvement and we could purchase digital tablets to help complete questionnaires in the field.

With over 1000 responses to the survey, we are in Mori territory and use cross tabs to compare variables via pivot tables.

## Lessons learned

The number of visits to some sites was poorly estimated prior to the start of the survey. We later refined the total estimated visits to sites that haven't been surveyed based on data collected from comparable sites.

The total number of visits may still be an under estimate as we do not undertake night time or regular winter survey, although observation surveys were scheduled to start earlier in the day during 2013. The results of a winter survey in 2010 and extra surveys during the 2012 Olympics and Para Olympics help to corroborate the methodology of the survey, which assumes a 12 hour activity period all year round rather than accounting for seasonal changes to daylight hours. As this is a conservative estimate of activity periods on the Forest, a drop in visitor numbers during winter helps balance the figures.

The need to mesh the way demographic data is collected from other surveys/consultation to be comparable, such as events feedback.



## CONCLUSION

The visitor survey has been even more successful than we could have anticipated. The consultant successfully met the aims of the brief on time and within budget and we have achieved the intended legacy of undertaking the survey ourselves. Overall, we are seeing a change in the outlook of colleagues towards the usefulness of data gathering and it is helping to keep staff and volunteers motivated.

Alison Millward Associates has also been running a survey for City Commons over the past two years and recommended the consultants who were selected to undertake the car park survey.

*The survey is providing in depth data, a good evaluation of what's going on and a benchmarking system. It contributes to data-based decision making. It demonstrates the value of the staff and volunteers who run the survey.*

Alison Millward, Consultant

25/2/14 Catherine Cavanagh



## Appendix 5: Key project members' interview summary

Interviews were conducted with a number of people who had been directly involved in the Branching Out project management and planning. People in a variety of different roles were interviewed. These ranged from the project manager who was bought in to lead the project, to the volunteer development officer who was responsible for the recruitment of volunteers throughout the project, and the community liaison officer who was in attendance for five years of the project.

### How well has the project met your expectations?

Everyone who participated in the interviews was pleased with how the project had gone. All responses indicated that the project had at least met, if not exceeded, the expectations of the interview participants. One participant said that all of the set project objectives and outcomes had been met, and another commented that they had actually exceeded most of their targets. Another participant thought that the project had been a positive experience, but did say that it could have been better, adding that the project funding which was allocated outside of the project was not always used well. Similarly, one person responded that the interpretation of the visitor centre, The View, could have gone better.

### How well has the project achieved its visions?

Visions were outlined for the project, encompassing a number of areas. These were 'extending opportunities to learn about Epping Forest's heritage', 'raising awareness of what has been before through interpretation, history and education', 'improving access for all and working towards more sustainable future', and 're-establishing a traditional forest management through grazing and pollarding'. Interview participants were asked whether they thought the project had excelled in any of these areas, and whether they felt there were any challenges faced.

#### Extending opportunities to learn about Epping Forest's heritage:

##### **Excelled**

The visitor centre, The View, was bought up by several people as a way the project excelled in extending learning opportunities. One of the participants commented that The View makes the forest feel more accessible and welcoming to visitors, and that the facilities are a major asset to be able to facilitate learning about heritage.

Mentioned most, however, was the engagement of schools with the forest. Multiple participants said that the fact that 25 schools had been reached over the past three years, with each paying multiple visits to the forest, was the main way the project excelled in extending educational opportunities. This provided learning opportunities for children who may not have otherwise been regular visitors to the forest, or ever visited at all. This was a way for children to learn about the heritage of the forest and also paved the way for outreach work to take place.

Finally, the visitor count showed an increase in visitors from black and ethnic minority communities, extending learning opportunities to demographics who may not have visited the forest prior to the inception of the project.

##### **Challenges**

There were also some comments about the challenges faced in attempting to extend learning opportunities about the forest's heritage. Investments for education in certain areas, such as the website or High Beach Visitor Centre did not yield as much as expected for example. There were also challenges faced in motivating learning providers to work more closely together, and some



challenged existed surrounding the understanding of the forest's audiences and expanding their audience.

[Raising awareness of what has been before through interpretation, history and education](#)

### **Excelled**

The new visitor centre was bought up again, this time as an excellent interpretation of the history of the forest, and as a centre of education. Another participant commented on the sheer amount of historical research that was undertaken and put online, in newsletters, and into the displays as a part of the project. Similarly, a participant who was involved with the archives bought up how the project made important, interesting, and fascinating documents available to the public in a very professional and accessible way.

Finally, the arborist apprenticeships were mentioned. These provided apprentices with a whole new set of personal and practical skills, whilst they were able to play a role in the upkeep of the forest.

### **Challenges**

There were only a few challenges mentioned. The first was that the forest no longer has a community engagement officer, a role which is vital for bringing in new members of the community. The second was that finance was focussed heavily on the visitor centre, leaving some areas without as much funding or staff time as they really needed.

[Improving access for all and working towards more sustainable future](#)

### **Excelled**

Comments in this area were primarily about how the project has excelled at generally making the forest a more accessible place for all. For example, the forest now having 9 trails, all of which are now well used, and access being improved to the 'honey pot' areas such as the visitor centre. Traffic calming measures have made the forest a safer and more pleasant place to be, as well as contributing towards its sustainability.

The project funding has meant that new materials and learning capabilities can be developed which contribute to forest sustainability. Varied skills, best practices, and evaluation skills and templates have also been developed due to the project, and so have specialised resources for children with special needs, allowing a greater range of visitors to access the forest and forest education.

Several of the participants mentioned the reduced number of car parks as excellent contributors to forest sustainability.

### **Challenges**

One participant commented on issues surrounding the quality of some of the provisions, such as litter bins falling apart, as well as poor quality of hard landscaping. Another discussed delays to the construction works, and a third participant bought up storage issues at the Butler's Retreat.

[Re-establishing a traditional forest management through grazing and pollarding](#)

### **Excelled**

All of the comments about the pollarding program were positive, with one participant discussing the arborist apprenticeships in relation to this. The arborist apprenticeships enabled the apprentices to be better skilled for the role and employment in the future. Participants also commented on the cattle grazing, commenting that it helped significantly in re-establishing traditional forest management.

[What do you feel has been the greatest success of the project?](#)

Each project member had slightly different ideas about what the greatest success of the project had been, dependent on their role and which parts of the project they worked on the most. The grazing



was mentioned by several participants who had worked on different areas of the project, with one person saying that the grazing infrastructure has been the greatest success because, although it still has problems, there is now an infrastructure where there wasn't one before. The increased number of visitors has also been mentioned multiple times, often in relation to the new visitor centre, The View, which several participants saw as a major success of the project in itself along with the landscaping. When mentioning visitors, volunteers were mentioned too by a few of the participants. One person said that involving large numbers of volunteers meant that the project challenged the understanding of the forest, and another was pleased that volunteers had been put into roles formalised with policies, procedures, and training.

One participant felt that the greatest success of the project had been understanding the historical importance of the forest, and another said that the project providing them with the ability to deliver a multi-faceted large scale project was the biggest success. Finally, one participant said that they felt the arborist apprentices were the biggest success of the project, along with the restoration of the veteran trees.

#### Who do you think has benefitted most from the project?

The most popular answer provided by participants was that the local communities and school groups benefitted most from the project. One comment was that families with impairments have found a lot of benefits from the 'honey pot' sites such as the Visitor Centre, and another participant said that the forest school sessions were beneficial for school pupils.

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*"Sandringham School is one that we have particularly impacted; now they are independently leading visits, they have integrated the forest into their curriculum, this especially from a school which is more economically deprived."*

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– Anneke Kempton, Field Studies Corporation

#### What do you feel are the greatest legacies of the Branching Out project?

A variety of answers were provided when participants were asked about the legacies of the project. Improved access and infrastructure were mentioned, as was the grazing. Volunteering was brought up several times, with participants saying that the program itself and the infrastructure being put into place were great legacies of the project. The new signage will last for around 25 years, which contributes to the legacy, as does the work having been completed on the trees, which have around another 300 years to live.

#### Do you feel that has been sufficient budget and resources?

Most participants said that there could have been greater budget and resources, with one adding that it never seemed like there was enough money. One participant felt that one additional community engagement officer was necessary, and another was of the opinion that there could have been more support across the senior management team. Keeping on the topic of staffing, another participant said that there was a need for more staffing in the education and interpretation sectors.



What would you like to see happen long term?

Continuation of the positive work started due to the forest was the primary theme when participants were asked what they would like to see happening at the forest long term. Comments in this area included continuing the work begun by arborists, continuing with the cattle grazing in the forest, continuing to educate students, and continuation of conservation work as a whole. Another participant said that they would like to see similar projects rolled out in other areas of the forest.

How can this be achieved?

Funding was bought up here by several participants. One said that greater funding for schools who are unable to self-fund visiting the forest would help to achieve continuation of the project work, and another thought that further grant funding for ongoing stewardship of the habitat would help. Encouraging locals to take ownership of the space was another comment, with suggestions for ways that this could be done including holding small community festivals and other events in the Forest.

Where do you feel there are barriers still existing to taking work further?

Resources, mainly lack of funding and lack of time, were the primary comment when participants were asked about barriers existing to taking the project further. Linking to this, there was also a comment about factors limiting forest education received by schools in the area, with the main concern being schools being unable to afford to bring their students to the forest. The outreach programme could help this, however there would need to be an increase in funding and resources.



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## Appendix 6: Branching out Legacy 2017-2027 DRAFT



## Appendix 7: Apprentice survey summary

Arborist apprentices were recruited as part of Epping Forest's Branching Out project, and helped to maintain the veteran trees and the forest as a whole. One apprentice completed a short survey about his time at Epping Forest, which was from 2011-2012.

The role of apprentice involved working for senior conservation arborists and carrying out a variety of forestry maintenance tasks as well as practical arboriculture tasks such as climbing, felling, and pruning. The survey respondent had also operated heavy machinery such as tractors, chippers, grinders, and four wheel drive trucks during his time as an apprentice. These all helped him to gain a variety of practical skills, such as maintenance skills through operating the chipper and chainsaw, and climbing skills which included rope techniques. He also gained knowledge about trees and timber, concerning tree function and their importance to the environment.

The respondent was asked to rate how well the apprenticeship had met his expectations on a scale of one to five, with one being not at all and five being completely, and he selected five. He expanded

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*"By learning these new skills I discovered I was capable of new personal depths that I didn't think I was able to reach, the confidence to which I gained through being an apprentice still stays with me to this day."*

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by commenting on the new personal depths he was able to discover thanks to the role.

This personal development was elaborated on in the next question, where the respondent was asked how he thinks he has developed personally over the course of the apprenticeship. Three things he says he gained during the apprenticeship are increased communication skill due to team tasks, increased confidence due to stepping outside of his comfort zone, and the knowledge that after the apprenticeship he wanted to remain in the same industry. He has indeed remained in the industry, either in a voluntary, part time, or full time employment capacity.

The respondent did not feel that there was anything that could be improved about the apprenticeship, and commented on the brilliant job the team leaders did to introduce the apprentices to the industry and prepare them for the future.

Finally, he commented that he learned so much from his experience of being an apprentice, and said that the arborist apprenticeships should continue as he is sure others would benefit from the experience as much as he had.



## Appendix 8: Teacher interview

This interview was conducted in October 2016 with a teacher who participated in the schools programme at Epping Forest as a part of the project.

**1. Can you start by telling me a bit about the visits you undertook to Epping Forest? When were the visits roughly?**

They were different visits throughout the year, they were a long time ago now. We had a local site at Theydon Bois that we used and we did pond dipping at High Beach, visited the Hunting Lodge for example, and then we'd return to school, to continue the activities in the classroom from what had been learnt on site.

**2. Which year group were they with?**

Year 5

**3. Were they self-guided (*i.e. the teacher led them*) or did a forest educator lead them (*i.e. from Field Studies Corporation, Suntrap Education Centre*)?**

Led by others

**4. Did you undertake any training as part of the programme as well as visits?**

There was no training but we did have meetings before, during and after with other teachers who were also doing the project.

**5. If yes, can you tell me a bit about this and how do you feel it affected your confidence to lead out of the classroom sessions?**

I don't think it particularly changed my confidence. It was alongside what we were already doing.

**6. Overall, how well has the programme met your expectations?**

It was really good, the children enjoyed it, we enjoyed it. It did what they said it was going to do.

**7. What do you think were the most important things the children/young people took away from the experience?**

It got them outside and got them doing something they wouldn't normally have the chance to do.

**8. Has anything happened as a result of the programme (*in your school, a year group, to teachers or individual pupils*)?**

No, nothing.



## Appendix 9: Explanation of Arnstein's Ladders model

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation. Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A Ladder of Participation. *Journal of American Institute of Planners*.

The bottom rungs of the ladder are (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy. These two rungs describe levels of "non-participation" that have been contrived by some to substitute for genuine participation. Their real objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programmes, but to enable powerholders to "educate" or "cure" the participants. Rungs 3 and 4 progress to levels of "tokenism" that allow the have-nots to hear and to have a voice: (3) Informing and (4) Consultation. When they are proffered by powerholders as the total extent of participation, citizens may indeed hear and be heard. But under these conditions they lack the power to insure that their views will be heeded by the powerful. When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow through, no "muscle," hence no assurance of changing the status quo. Rung (5) Placation is simply a higher level tokenism because the ground rules allow have-nots to advise, but retain for the powerholders the continued right to decide.

Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision making clout. Citizens can enter into a (6) Partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the topmost rungs, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control, have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power.

Obviously, the eight-rung ladder is a simplification, but it helps to illustrate the point that so many have missed - that there are significant gradations of citizen participation. Knowing these gradations makes it possible to cut through the hyperbole to understand the increasingly strident demands for participation from the have-nots as well as the gamut of confusing responses from the powerholders.