

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Epping Forest & Commons	5 November 2012	
Subject: EPPING FOREST GRAZING MONITORING AUDIT	Public	
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 35/12	For Decision	
<p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>This report provides the first assessment by the Independent Grazing Assessor, Dr Peter Dennis of Aberystwyth University, of the approach of the Epping Forest Grazing Strategy in terms of nature conservation benefits and on the effectiveness of the biodiversity monitoring currently being undertaken. The full Assessor's report is provided as a Appendix 2 of this report.</p> <p>In addition, the results from the monitoring of a rare Forest plant, Lousewort, are reported and show that following the re-establishment of extensive grazing the population of this plant has expanded significantly, making it the largest extant population of the species in Essex and one of only 3 known surviving populations in the county.</p> <p><u>Recommendations</u></p> <p>I recommend that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Independent Assessor is invited to visit the monitoring sites across the Forest in 2013 and consider extensions to monitoring areas across habitats; • the Assessor's 2nd report is provided to the Management Plan Steering Group for consideration prior to being submitted to Committee in November 2013 		

Main Report

Background

1. The Epping Forest Grazing Rationale and Strategy was approved by Committee in May 2006. Following reports on the implementation of the Grazing Strategy in January and November 2007 (Reports SEF 04/07 and 25/07). A Grazing Review Group was set up by the Superintendent to take an overview of biodiversity monitoring and the impact on recreation interests in the Forest.
2. The Grazing Review Group met under the Chairmanship of an independent assessor during 2008 and 2009 and these meetings were reported to Committee. However, following the resignation of this chairman and the start of the *Branching Out* Project in autumn 2009 it was considered more effective to review recreational impacts through a series of new Visitor

Forums that were to be set up. The ecological and biodiversity monitoring would be reviewed separately by a newly appointed Independent Grazing Assessor.

3. The appointment of an Independent Grazing Assessor was approved in July 2010 (EFCC Report SEF 21/10) to give an objective overview of the way in which the impacts of grazing are to be measured and monitored.
4. The role of the Independent Grazing Assessor was approved to cover the following areas: to analyse the current ecological monitoring of grazing at Epping Forest; to provide advice on additional or alternative monitoring that could be viably achieved; to provide additional knowledge from comparable sites and situations; to provide the Superintendent with an annual validation report on the ecological monitoring.

Current Position

5. The current Independent Grazing Assessor was chosen from the 4 names approved in the Committee report of July 2010 (SEF 21/10). **Dr Peter Dennis of Aberystwyth University** accepted the role in autumn 2010. He initially corresponded with and spoke to the Conservation Section staff about the Epping Forest Grazing Strategy and other relevant reports in 2010. He then met CoL officers on site in summer 2011 for a series of field visits to grazed and currently un-grazed sites across the Forest.
6. Following preliminary feedback from staff and the further exchange of information, Dr Dennis was asked to produce the first of a series of annual reports to the Superintendent in summer 2012. This evaluation document is attached as **Appendix 2** of this report.
7. Dr Dennis finds that the Epping Forest Grazing Strategy is appropriate in its approach and this is supported by the scientific evidence from a very broad range of studies, in a wide variety of habitats, across the UK and Europe. He further concludes that the baseline vegetation and other species monitoring is both suitable and effective. He supports the phased nature of the Strategy and proposes that a precautionary, adaptive management approach is taken using the results of monitoring to modify it, as required, to local conditions across the Forest.
8. Grazing monitoring continues to be undertaken annually by staff, consultants and volunteers across the range of sites and species outlined in Dr Dennis's report and as described in the July 2010 Committee report (and its detailed appendices (SEF 21/10)) referred to above. The monitoring is currently carried out across both grazed sites and un-grazed sites.
9. In addition to the Assessor's report, the main monitoring work conducted in 2012, for which results can be reported here, is the re-mapping of the

distribution of Lousewort, a rare plant at one of its only sites in the Essex/London region. The results are mapped and attached at **Appendix 1**.

10. Lousewort was re-found at Almshouse Plain in 1997, in an area now at the centre of the extensive grazing area. Between 1997 and 2001 its distribution remained confined and stable as small patches of plants mainly towards the centre of the Plain. This is shown by the red areas on the map at **Appendix 1**. Since the re-establishment of extensive grazing in 2002 in the Fairmead-Almshouse area, the map clearly demonstrates the rapid and substantial expansion of the species. It has also been found outside the area shown on the map at the western and southern ends of Almshouse Plain and at Fairmead several hundred metres away. Other species have also benefited from the dynamic impact of grazing including Devil's-bit Scabious, a special plant of Forest pastures and ride edges.

Options

11. Currently the vegetation monitoring has been focused on the open areas of grassland and heath. In future, the options for the monitoring of transects across the habitats and in the wooded areas will be explored (see Assessor's report, Section 5 in Appendix 2). These options will be assessed with the Independent Assessor in the light of the monitoring protocols and areas being adopted as part of the UK Long-term Monitoring Network in which Epping Forest (along with Burnham Beeches) is now participating.

Proposals

12. It is proposed that in 2013 Dr Dennis should re-visit the Forest to review the continuing monitoring of sites and to provide advice and direction as to any additional monitoring or changes required. He would take into account any additional monitoring being carried out for the UK Long-Term Monitoring Network and his advice would be sought on the integration of the grazing monitoring with this where appropriate. He would also examine any new areas of grazing or extensions to the grazing areas.
13. Dr Dennis would provide a report to the Superintendent by autumn 2013. This would provide feedback on his site visits and his suggestions for monitoring and management of grazing for biodiversity and conservation objectives.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Financial and risk implications

14. The costs of the Independent Grazing Assessor are met from the Epping Forest Division's local risk budget supported by a grant from the City Bridge Trust. Over the last 18 months consultancy and audit costs have been £5,720 (excl. VAT). Over the next year approximately 3-4 days are required, including site visits, with advice and an audit report the costs are expected to be up to £2,040 (excl. VAT). The resources for the monitoring work itself are provided from the current staff, specialist consultants as

required and supplemented by wildlife volunteers. Resources for monitoring are also provided through the 3-year grant from the City Bridge Trust which is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

Legal implications

15. There are no legal implications for the City.

Property Implications

16. There are no Property implications associated with this appointment or in the findings of this report.

HR Implications

17. There are no human resources implications associated with the appointment of Independent Grazing Assessor or in the findings of this report. Any monitoring volunteers are recruited and managed through the volunteer scheme as part of the approved *Branching Out* project.

Strategic Implications

City Together

18. The work, proposals and options outlined above meet the *City Together* vision of a *World Class City* and, specifically, 2 of its 5 themes: “A world class City that supports our communities” and “A World Class City which protects, promotes and enhances our environment”.

Open Spaces Department Business Plan

19. The proposals and options above follow from 3 of the Open Spaces Department’s Strategic Aims of: “providing high quality accessible Open Spaces and services in accordance with nationally recognised standards for the benefit of London and the Nation”; “involving communities in the management of our sites” and “adopting sustainable working practices, promoting the variety of life (biodiversity) and protecting the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations”.

Epping Forest Management Plan

20. This report also matches the Epping Forest Vision for the 21st Century, in particular:

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

Conclusion

21. The Assessor concludes that the Grazing Strategy's objectives are supported by a broad range of evidence from scientific studies across the UK and Europe, including the impacts of grazing on mosaics of habitats. The Assessor also confirms that the combination of current and proposed monitoring methods at Epping Forest is suitable and suggests future monitoring to be considered. The example of the monitoring of the rare plant species, Lousewort, examined by the Assessor during his visits in 2011, shows a significant positive impact of grazing on the sward in an area of wood-pasture and the 2012 results presented here show that these positive impacts are continuing.

Background Papers:

- *Epping Forest Grazing Strategy 2006 (updated for Branching Out Project in 2008)*
- *SEF 25/07 EF&C Committee report on: the 2nd Public Consultation on Grazing*
- *SEF 21/10 EF&C Committee report on: Ecological Monitoring Programme for Grazing*

Appendices

Appendix 1: Map of distribution of Lousewort near Almshouse Plain, Epping Forest (Compartment 22).

Appendix 2: Independent Grazing Assessor's Report '*Evaluation of the grazing management strategy proposed for Epping Forest*' by Dr Peter Dennis, Aberystwyth University.

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