

## **APPENDIX 5 – DRAFT LETTER TO OTHER COMPETENT AUTHORITIES**

To include: GLA, ECC, Harlow District, LBWF, LBR, London Borough of Enfield, London Borough of Haringey, London Borough of Newham

Cc Natural England

Cc EFDC Local Plan PINS Inspector

### **Emerging Epping Forest SAC Mitigation Strategy update**

Following my previous letter of 28<sup>th</sup> November to you and members of other local authorities, on governance for the SAC Mitigation Strategy, I wanted to provide an update on The Conservators of Epping Forest's view of the current situation. I also wish to reinforce our previous request for renewed momentum in this process. I have written separately, but in a similar vein, to Epping Forest District Council because of the need to address a number of more detailed issues relating to their current Local Plan examination stage. I have also written to the Borough of Broxbourne with a specific response to the issues its Cabinet member for Planning had raised with me directly.

#### SAC Mitigation Strategy governance

Having made the offer to provide governance for the SAC Mitigation Strategy Oversight Group, in my letter of 28<sup>th</sup> November, it is gratifying to see re-engagement by most parties since then. I am grateful to the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) for bringing together a number of London boroughs and, importantly, the Greater London Authority (GLA) on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020 to discuss the mitigation work and how to progress it in London. It is also very welcome that a second meeting of the SAC Mitigation Strategy Oversight Group was held on 24<sup>th</sup> February chaired by Epping Forest District Council. There is now the promise of regular meetings of this latter group and I hope that this will now lead to progress with the essential avoidance and mitigation measures.

However, there are two issues of continuing concern to the Conservators. Firstly, there remains the need for coordination between London and Essex as regional entities in this endeavour. I hope that between all of us we can ensure proportionate, active and coordinated participation by each authority. I look forward to your support in achieving this result.

Secondly, not all parties are engaging with the same, or at least a proportionate, level of commitment at present. This is partly influenced by the various stages of local plans but this presents a significant problem for achieving a comprehensive and full Mitigation Strategy.

I look forward to working with your authority on the above issues over the coming months and to hearing more about the governance structure and terms of engagement for a coordinated approach to the above problems. **The Conservators' offer to convene meetings remains should this be seen by other parties as a helpful option in ensuring coordination and consensus.**

#### Epping Forest Visitor Survey and future costs-undertakings for developing a robust Strategy

The additional data yielded by the Epping Forest Visitor Survey 2019, presented to the Oversight Group on 24<sup>th</sup> February, are important and provide further evidence of the widespread pressures on the Forest. This new Visitor Survey also revealed the need for, and the importance of, high quality alternative outdoor recreational destinations (SANGs) in the enlarged 6.36km ZoI. It makes clear the kind of characteristics that would be required for these additional SANGs sites to be effective.

I consider that the second Epping Forest Visitor Survey's enlarged Zone of Influence demonstrates the urgent need to address the impact of increased housing and the limited alternative greenspaces around Epping Forest's SAC boundaries. Working together there is the opportunity to achieve an outcome much better designed than the sum of individual parts, by providing new greenspace options that are large and attractive enough to protect Epping Forest and meet the health and well-being needs of the larger resident populations.

However, whilst welcoming this Visitor Survey, the fact that the timing and better weather of the September 2019 survey, compared with the 2017 survey, increased the Zone of Influence (Zol) indicates to me that a follow-up summer survey (May/June) would be important to consolidate the Zol evidence. As part of the costs-undertakings for the evidence-gathering for the Strategy, to which I referred in my previous letter, we hope that your Council would be willing to contribute financially, alongside us and other parties, to this third survey. We would like it to include an overarching analysis that would bring together all the data from the three surveys and examine the predicted "uplift" in visitor pressure from different locations in more detail.

#### SAMMs development

In relation to managing visitor pressure, we provided some background to our more detailed SAMMs-focused work at the Oversight Group on 24<sup>th</sup> February. The scope of this work is limited at the moment, by time and resources, to a focus on three visitor "hotspots" within the Forest SAC. Therefore, we would welcome a dialogue with your Council and the other competent authorities, including Lee Valley Park Authority, as soon as possible, about financial and other support in broadening and deepening this work to inform a more comprehensive access strategy.

We think that it is vital for this access strategy to be developed alongside the emerging Green Infrastructure Strategies of the London Plan and other Local Plans, as well as a reinvigorated Green Arc Project. I look forward to ways in which we can work together to achieve such coordination in our recreational access work and the protection of Epping Forest SAC.

#### Quality of management and funding of alternative sites (SANGs)

As well as new sites within the Zol, the interception destinations I refer to above may include non-SAC parts of the Forest and its Buffer Lands. Throughout all the Mitigation Strategy development work, there needs to be clear evidence offered as to how the alternative destinations would be funded and managed long-term by qualified land managers. There also needs to be evidence and monitoring in place to demonstrate how these sites function to both attract and retain potential Forest visitors for the all-important repeat visits, whilst enhancing biodiversity. We look forward to the discussions with you on the management of these sites across the enlarged Zol and how we may be involved in their design.

Yours sincerely,

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Chairman, Epping Forest and Commons Committee