

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	08 Jul 2013
<b>Subject:</b> Epping Forest: Land management proposals for newly acquired land at Upshire (Gifford Wood)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 22/13	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Summary</b>	
<p>This report describes the proposed land use for the three fields totalling 29.7 acres (12.019 hectares) purchased by the Conservators at Upshire in 2012. The proposed activity includes the creation of 8 acres (3.237 hectares) of new native woodland, Gifford Wood, and a new hay meadow. Significant community involvement is proposed for implementing this project, including school, staff and community planting events. An application to the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme will be made to help fund the works. Unresolved risks for the project include the impact of the need for additional environmental assessments</p>	
<b>Recommendation(s)</b>	
Members are asked to:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the change in land use of the three fields to woodland and a hay meadow.</li> <li>• Note the extensive community involvement planned for the practical planting of the woodland.</li> <li>• Note the application of further funding from the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme for future maintenance of Gifford Wood.</li> <li>• Note the risks identified for the project.</li> </ul>	

## Main Report

### **Background**

1. 29.7 acres (12.019 hectares) of land at Horseshoe Hill, Upshire was bought by the Conservators in July 2012 following approval by your Committee on 7 November 2011 and the Finance Committee of 15 November 2011. The land comprises three grass fields, previously managed as horse paddocks, and is adjacent to two green lanes on Forest land– Rugged Lane and Sergeants Green Lane. Oxleys Wood, which is an existing ancient woodland and Local Wildlife Site, is situated on Epping Forest Buffer Land on the other side of Rugged Lane. The land was bought by the Forest Fund with the current Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Roger Gifford's Lords Mayor's Appeal supporting the Gifford Wood Appeal to raise money to plant trees on two of these fields to create a new native woodland.
2. The new woodland and surrounding open ground areas have been designed to create a pleasant wood for visitors, to improve habitat connectivity in the local landscape and to manage existing features to improve the value of these habitats for biodiversity.

### **Current Position**

3. The initial design was made by woodland consultants and subsequently modified in consultation with Epping Forest Officers. From the top of the slopes of the two northern fields there is a panoramic view over the Lee Valley. Vistas have been retained over this landscape and parts of the fields have been left unplanted to meet this aim. There are further unplanted areas to take account of operational constraints such as underground sewage pipes, and a public right of way that passes north to south in the western field.
4. The species included in the new woodland are typical of Epping Forest and the adjacent Oxleys Wood. Oak and hornbeam will be the main species with field maple, rowan and small-leaved lime at lower densities. To create structural diversity and increase the habitat value shrub species such as hawthorn and hazel will be planted along the new woodland's edges. The planting will need to be protected from deer and rabbits and a fence will be erected in September 2013 while ground conditions for machinery access are predicted to be still good. It is intended that the trees will start to be planted from late November.
5. There are two ephemeral ponds on the site which will be made deeper to ensure they retain water for longer through the year, thereby creating a more valuable habitat. The hedges that border the fields will be managed either through hedge laying, trimming or conversion into woodland as they are allowed to grow and merge with the developing new woodland.
6. The third field to the south has a greater diversity of flowering plants within the sward. This field will be used to make hay for the conservation grazing herd, thus supporting the Grazing Expansion Plan. It is proposed that the biodiversity of this site be improved in future years by creating a new pond next to the northern hedge and also by using green hay from species rich

grassland, such as Warlies Park hay meadow, to further increase the diversity of plants.

7. Epping Forest officers are currently working on a Community Engagement Plan, which will involve inviting local schools, volunteer groups associated with the Forest, the Upshire community, potential commercial sponsors and the general public to come and plant trees. In spring 2014 there will be an official opening of the woodland. In addition, the Liveries Wood Group will be supporting the Appeal and Epping Forest Officers are currently working with them to find a suitable and mutually agreeable way to accommodate them. Contractors will plant any trees not planted during these activities. As part of the community engagement plan we will look at opportunities to encourage long term volunteer support with the care of Gifford Wood and the surrounding land.
8. Bridleway and footpath access to the new site will be improved. Entrances into all three fields will be upgraded with a formal site entrance created with a lych gate from Sergeants Green. Access through the existing public rights of way and from Rugged Lane will be improved with new bridges and clearance of overhanging vegetation. New benches will be installed at the viewpoints. To ensure a rabbit proof barrier is maintained only pedestrian gates will be installed in the protective fence around the new planting. Elsewhere on the site there will be unrestricted bridleway access.
9. Once the woodland is planted there will be a five year initial maintenance programme to ensure successful establishment of the new woodland and to consolidate the work undertaken on the associated hedgerows, and paths. Map 1 shows the constraints that have been accommodated in the woodland design. Map 2 shows the woodland design and environmental features. Map 3 shows the provision for visitors.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

### **The City Together Strategy**

10. The future use of this site meets two of the key themes “A world class City that supports our communities” and “A World Class City which protects, promotes and enhances our environment”.

### **The Corporate Plan**

11. The future use of this site fulfils two of the five key policy priorities: ‘KPP4 Maximising the opportunities and benefits afforded by our role in supporting London’s communities’; and ‘KPP5 Increasing the impact of the City’s cultural and heritage offer on the life of London and the nation’.

### **Open Spaces Department Business Plan**

12. Through the creation of Gifford Wood four of the five Open Spaces Department aims will be met: providing high quality accessible open spaces, involving communities in site management, working sustainably to improve the variety of life, and offering opportunities to value and enjoy the outdoors.

### **Epping Forest Management Plan**

13. The ability to produce hay for winter feed from one of the fields supports activity under the Grazing Expansion Plan.
14. Notwithstanding the fact that the proposals promote the above strategies, other demands on available funds mean that were it not for the Lord Mayor's Appeal to support the charitable purposes of the project by providing funds for initial establishment costs, the project could not be initiated and the other funding sources to meet maintenance costs could not be levered in.

### **Implications**

15. **Financial** - The planting of the wood and the cost of the fencing and habitat works will be funded through the Gifford Wood Appeal. An application to the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme (Woodland Creation Grant) is currently being prepared for submission this summer; this includes an application for the Farm Woodland Premium (FWP) which is additional funding to compensate for planting woodland on existing agricultural land. By entering into FWP the land can also be included in the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) application. Furthermore the site qualifies for an additional contribution as a site of 'Quality of Place', these are priority areas for improved access to woodlands. The Woodland Creation Grant pays 80% of the total grant in year 1 and the remaining 20% in year 5. This will amount to approximately £18,000 in 2013/14 and £3900 in 2017/18. The FWP and SPS will add approximately £2900 annually for 15 years. Under typical conditions this will cover the annual cost of maintaining the site during the lifetime of the funding.
16. Grant funding from the Forestry Commission's EWGS is to some extent competitive and there is a risk we will be unsuccessful. It is anticipated that the scale of funding from the Lord Mayor's appeal should be sufficient to cover any shortfall. Additional works not directly linked to Gifford Wood, such as the proposed pond creation in the meadow field, will be dependent on funding sources being identified for their implementation. The longer term maintenance costs for the area will be met from Epping Forest Local Risk budgets with much of it within the competence of volunteer groups.

### **Key Risks**

17. Gifford Wood is planned to be planted in Winter 2013/14. The weather patterns for this time of year over the last few years have been predominantly wet. If this pattern continues this winter this will present serious logistical problems for planting the woodland. This risk will be minimised by undertaking

all works requiring machinery to be carried out from September 2013 to take advantage of good ground conditions.

18. There is a risk that the Forestry Commission does not agree to some or all of the land being planted. This is commonly linked to archaeological considerations. Planting may be permitted but is dependent on the outcome of archaeological investigations which may affect the work programme.

## **Conclusion**

19. The land bought at Upshire in 2012 will be used to create Gifford Wood across two fields, and subject to successful fundraising will be funded by the Lord Mayor's Appeal and a grant application to the England Woodland Grant Scheme. The third field will be used as a hay meadow to create hay for the conservation grazing herd.
20. The initial establishment costs of the new woodland will be met through the Gifford Wood Appeal. Longer term annual maintenance costs will be funded from the English Woodland Grant Scheme income.
21. Key risks to the project are from the need for further environmental assessments and extreme unseasonal weather.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 - Map 1 - constraints that have been accommodated in the woodland design.
- Appendix 2 - Map 2 woodland design and environmental features.
- Map 3 - provision for visitors.

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