

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	8 July 2013
Subject: Epping Forest Management Plan (Phase 1 Consultation)	Public
Report of: Paul Thomson, Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 30/13	For Decision

Summary

A new Management Plan is required to guide the future management of Epping Forest, following the expiry of the previous plan. The inherent value of engaging with interested parties, during the very early stages of the development of the new plan, has been recognised in previous reports.

A comprehensive consultation is proposed for stakeholders, community groups and members of the public and stakeholders throughout August, September and October 2013.

The consultation will capture the ideas, thoughts and feelings, on management issues faced by the Conservators, giving a greater understanding of the priorities for managing the Forest over the next 10 year period from the perspective of our stakeholders and visitors.

While the draft Epping Forest Management Plan (EFMP) Phase 1 Consultation document necessarily addresses a wide range of issues and complex policy matters, the intention is to present the material in an engaging and accessible manner through the use of a copywriter and presentation through a web-based facility.

This report seeks to delegate powers from the Epping Forest and Commons Committee to the smaller Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group Committee, to progress the approval of the draft EFMP Phase 1 Consultation allowing implementation of the public consultation in the most expedient manner so as not to miss the vital 'summer' engagement window.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Delegate power to the Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group to approve the development of draft text and implement the EFMP Phase 1 Consultation
- Approve the Marketing Plan (Appendix 3) and Consultation Programme (Appendix 4)

Main Report

Background

1. The most recent Epping Forest Management Plan expired at the end of 2010. Although work from the 2004-2010 plan continues, a new plan is required. A report, agreed at your Committee on 9 November 2009, outlined the format (Appendix 1) and timetable for the production of the new plan, including the proposal to undertake a comprehensive pre-draft consultation with community groups, members of the public and stakeholders.
2. A further report agreed at your Committee, on 5 March 2012, adopted the Epping Forest Statement of Community Involvement. This document outlined the scale, scope and duration of the public consultation process and identified the groups with which the Conservators routinely engage.
3. The timetable for the review of the Epping Forest Management Plan agreed by your Committee on 9 November 2009, which was due to be completed by May 2011, has not been achieved. The ambitious timetable outlined in the report underestimated staff resource and background information required to compile the detailed documents needed to support the expanded consultation process.
4. Early consultation is a proven method to garner support and instil confidence in management teams. The approval by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee (5 March 2012) of the Statement of Community Involvement outlined a commitment to effective and meaningful consultation.
5. Consultations carried out over busy summer months prove more fruitful than those during the quieter winter period. In particular, those undertaken in the months prior to Christmas have been heavily criticised as individuals feel there is no time left to commit to engaging as the festive season and it's required preparation and many events is the focus.
6. There are more opportunities in summer when Officers can promote and market the consultation by 'piggybacking' at local events, fairs and shows.

Current Position

7. Much work has gone into drafting the phase one management plan consultation. A robust structure has been formed, based on the key duties within the Epping Forest Acts. The structure refers to themes, management issues and strands.
8. Officers adopted a collegiate approach to developing the consultation document framework, ensuring that all members of staff contributed to identifying the management issues the Conservator's face and providing the opportunity to engage from the outset.

9. The six themes are based on the duties of the Conservators as outlined by the Epping Forest Acts. Each theme contains a number of management issues.
10. Each management issue is explained, in plain English, outlining the major issues and challenges faced by the Conservators in respect of that issue, what the Conservators are currently doing to address the issue and what future measures might be considered.
11. It is on these management issues that the thoughts and opinions of our stakeholders, community groups and individual users will be sought, using three different question types; open, closed and ranked.
12. Table 1 shows the number of management issues that are covered within each duty. A full list can be found in the EFMP Phase 1 Consultation (Appendix 2)

Duty	Number of Management Issues
Preservation of the Natural Aspect	10
Protection of the Unspoilt Forest	10
Regulation and Management	8
Heritage	5
Public Recreation and Enjoyment	18
Management of Deer	3

Table 1

13. The strands are wide ranging, with one or more strand being applicable to every management issue. These strands allow the Conservators to apply wider departmental and corporate objectives found in the Open Spaces Business Plan 2013-2015 and the City of London Strategy to the EFMP Phase 1 Consultation.
14. Strands cover the following; Visitor Experience, Sustainability, Health & Safety (H&S), Outreach, Lifelong Learning, Equality, Training, Accessibility, Volunteering, Public Involvement, Communications, Information & Marketing and Finances & Resources.
15. The volume of the full consultation document is expected to run to over 250 pages. Officers believe that by delegating authority to the smaller Management Plan Steering Group Committee the document can be developed and approved in manageable 'bite size' chunks.
16. A number of the final draft sections were presented for discussion at the Management Plan Steering Group Committee on 1 July 2013. Generally received well, a number of comments were made. Specifically, members thought that the strand explanations were unnecessarily lengthy and, on occasion, patronising for the reader. There was also a strong feeling that the order in which the themes were presented needed revising.

17. The Management Plan Steering Group Committee on the same date agreed that there is a need to progress the public consultation with a degree of urgency.
18. The consultation will help raise public understanding and awareness of the significant and wide ranging responsibilities that the Conservators. Effective consultation will capture the ideas, thoughts and feelings of our visitors and encourage an informed dialogue between the Conservators and the consultees.
19. A web based consultation software package (INOVEM Consult) has been researched, tested and procured to alleviate the time-consuming, and difficult, process faced by Officers undertaking a consultation of this size.
20. INOVEM Consult allows individuals to select the themes or management issues which they are interested in from the interactive menu, without having to leaf through a very large document.
21. To encourage consultees to respond to the wider document, and not solely on the issues that interest them, Officers intend to use interactive cross referencing, encouraging responses to associated management issues that can be linked to areas of interest.
22. Instant data reporting, not only on completion but on demand, at any point throughout the duration of the consultation, is also provided by the software. This removes the need for data collection and processing by Officers and provides an instant information source.
23. INOVEM Consult provides a single channel, accessed by multiple users, in which to respond to comments. This prevents duplication of effort and, on completion of the consultation, a report which meets our, 'You said, we did' qualitative data commitment (Epping Forest Statement of Community Involvement) immediately.
24. In accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement, the document is available to view for a two week period in advance of the 'live' consultation, known as the 'period of notice'. The period of notice allow marketing of the consultation to take place, for example providing users access to the document via email, social media and other formats without eating into the consultation period.
25. The Marketing Programme (Appendix 3) outlines the methods that Officers intend to employ to ensure that the consultation is effectively promoted both in the period of notice and during the early weeks of the 'live' consultation period.
26. The Consultation Programme (Appendix 4) outlines the methods, events and timetable of the consultation.

Proposals

It is proposed that;

27. Subject to approval of your Committee, delegated powers are issued to the Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group to progress and approve draft text for use in the EFMP Phase 1 Consultation.

28. The public consultation document is approved, in stages, at Management Plan Steering Group Committee meetings held through July and early August.
29. Consultation commences with a two week period of notice and be followed by a live consultation period of 12 weeks, as outlined the Consultation Programme (Appendix 4).
30. Officers hold an exhibition allowing individuals to view the document and an exhibition outlining the duties, issues and strands in three locations across the Forest; The View Visitor Centre, the Temple Visitor Centre and at Harrow Road.
31. Supported access sessions are provided to make the consultation accessible to those who wish to comment but are unfamiliar with, or lack confidence using computer systems.
32. A hard copy of the consultation is available only on request from the Conservators via the Warren Offices.
33. Officers provide a short update on the 'to date' findings of the consultation for submission to your Committee in September 2013.
34. Officers produce a full report detailing the findings of the consultation, containing both quantitative and qualitative data, for submission to your Committee in November 2013.
35. The feedback gained from our stakeholders and visitors during the phase 1 public consultation is used to influence the production of the Draft Management Plan to be submitted to your Committee in 2014.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

36. The consultation supports the 'City Together Strategy: Heart of a World Class City 2008-2014 under the following theme;
 - To provide high quality accessible Open Spaces and services in accordance with nationally recognised standards for the benefit of London and the Nation
37. The consultation supports the Development Objectives within the Open Spaces Department Business Plan 2012-2015;
 - Inclusion – Involve communities in the care and management of our sites.

Implications

38. The cost of undertaking the consultation is estimated at £15,500 which will be met from the Epping Forest Local Risk Budget. This includes advertising and printing costs in cases where the online facility is not accessible.
39. While there is no legal responsibility placed on the Conservators to carry out a consultation when drafting the management plan, it is required, under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, to have the plan adopted as a Development Plan Document within the Local Development Frameworks of

the neighbouring local authorities. This would support the Conservators in the effective regulation and management of the Forest.

40. Undertaking the public consultation will place pressure on Epping Forest staff time but less so than previous consultations, due to the web based system removing the need for data inputting or processing.
41. With the potential for several thousand responses, the online data collection facility will update the current database of stakeholders and interested visitors with clean accurate data for use by the Conservators.
42. By adopting a web based consultation and encouraging use of it in preference to paper based consultation is a step forward in terms of sustainability.

Conclusion

43. It is critically important that the future management plans for Epping Forest recognise and acknowledge public aspirations for both policy and practice in future management activity.
44. Early and demonstrable public engagement with a wide as possible range of the charity's beneficiaries will help inform policy development and prioritisation, while also providing the best opportunity for the wider adoption of policy by partner authorities.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Seven step 'Epping Forest Management Plan' process
- Appendix 2 – Management Issues listed by theme
- Appendix 3 – Marketing Plan
- Appendix 4 - Consultation Programme

Background Papers:

Epping Forest Management Plan Phase 1 Consultation (Management Plan Steering Group Committee – July 2013)

Epping Forest Management Plan 2011-2021 Consultation and Publication Timetable

Epping Forest Statement of Community Involvement

Epping Forest Statement of Community Involvement – Update

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Laura Lawson

Projects Officer

T: 020 8532 5334

E: laura.lawson@cityoflondon.gov.uk