

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group Epping Forest & Commons	19 December 2014 12 January 2015
Subject: Epping Forest Work Programme Out-turn 2013-2014	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 04 /15	For Information

Summary

This report summarises the work completed as part of the access and habitat Work programme for Epping Forest from **April 2013 to March 2014** inclusive.

Amongst the **highlights** of the work by staff and contractors were:

- the planting of new land at Upshire named **Gifford's Wood** – achieved from funding through the Lord Mayor's Appeal and the Woodland Grant Scheme;
- the completion of work on 152 Keystone Oaks and Beeches for the year, with an increased proportion of ancient Oaks included, resulting in the grand total of **882 Keystones Trees** completed during 4 years of the *Branching Out* Project;
- a huge clearing up effort during October and November as a result of **St Jude's storm** which damaged hundreds of trees across the Forest;
- **wood-pasture restoration** carried out across 15 Forest compartments;
- the completion of **Jubilee Pond** and its easy-access trail;
- the tendering of the *Boviguard invisible fencing* installation contract to create a 24km network;
- the installation of **4 cattle grids** and the erection of over 4 kilometres (km) of wooden fencing along the two busiest A-roads.

In addition, the two main volunteers' groups, the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) and the Epping Forest Centenary Trust, carried out work on over 30 sites. The EFCV put a lot of effort into its new core sites in eight areas across the Forest. The Scout Project 824 highlight was the opening up of a significant area of wood-pasture along Jubilee Ride in Bury Wood.

The habitats work programme is supported by significant annual income from the agri-environment grants administered by the Rural Payments Agency and Natural England which this year amounted to £320,105.06 in total. The Gifford's Wood Project was supported by total funding of nearly £100,000 by the Lord Mayor's Appeal and the Woodland Grant Scheme. Further income was received from the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Tubney Charitable Trust for the Forest trees and grazing management under the *Branching Out* Project.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. This report reviews the conservation projects, habitat management and tree safety work achieved during the year 2013 – 14 by the newly formed Operations Section and volunteer groups with habitat advice and work programmes provided by the Conservation Section.
2. The habitat work programme is drawn from the Epping Forest Management Plan approved in 2004 and the *Branching Out* Project, which began in 2009. Background details of the projects can be found in the main Management Plan and in the other documents listed below under '*Background Papers*'.

Current Position

3. The habitats work programme is supported financially by Natural England through its Environmental Stewardship Scheme as well as other agri-environment income administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).
4. The management of most of the grasslands in the Forest and on the Buffer Lands is covered by payments under the Entry Level Scheme (ELS), with additional income for grassland management from the Single Payment Scheme.
5. Other habitats work in the Forest, especially within the scrub and wooded areas, is supported by specific Higher Level Scheme (HLS) payments at higher rates of payment and this includes cattle grazing, wood-pasture restoration and scrub coppicing.
6. The total of income from these sources this year amounted to £320,105.06, which included over £34,400 in capital grants towards grazing and wood-pasture restoration work.
7. In addition, the infrastructure for the grazing in the form of cattle grids and fencing has been supported by a 74% grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with further significant funding for the grids from Essex County Council. The invisible fencing network has been tested with the help of an 80% grant from Natural England through its Stewardship special capital grants and further funding of up to 60% has been offered for equipment, with tendering for the *Boviguard* installation contract taking place during this year (see below).
8. This year's work by volunteers was carried out at over 30 sites across the Forest by the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) and Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT) and directed by the Forest's Biodiversity Officer.
9. The EFCV eight core sites were: Gilbert's Slade, Walthamstow Forest, Fernhills, Lord's Bushes, Chingford Plain, Rushey Plain, Long Running and Swaines Green.

Car Parks, Barrier Gates, fences and hedges

10. The cyclical work programme of maintenance was carried out with the new Head of Operations further developing the long-term programme for this work.

Roads, Rides & Trails Network

11. Ride and trails work concentrated this year on clearing back vegetation and dealing with tree hazards (identified in 2012-13 winter surveys) along the whole network.
12. In addition, as part of the cattle grids work (see **Grazing** below) the section of **Taylor's Ride** crossing Rangers Road was re-routed, with a new culverts to allow horse-riders access across the road and past the grid without the need to pass through any gates.

Keystone Trees Strategy

13. Following the poor, cold and wet summer of 2012, the summer of 2013 was much warmer and drier following a mild, wet spring. As a result Oaks had recovered significantly from 2012 when many had shown the signs of stress with noticeable stem bleeds.
14. In 2013 a detailed inspection by the Conservation team of the 350 ancient Oak pollards at Barn Hoppitt found no stem bleeds, virtually no defoliation and no significant powdery mildew. The leaf size was large and the trees generally had good canopy cover. Therefore, work deferred from 2012-13 on the Oaks (see previous work programme report) was carried out this year. The preliminary results of this work were reported at the UK Ancient Tree Forum's annual conference held at Ashted Common generating considerable interest.
15. Whilst awaiting these tree health condition results, 47 Beech and 5 Oak Keystone trees were completed during the summer. During the winter window, between November 2013 and February 2014, more Oaks were treated (24) and overall a further 100 Keystone trees were worked on. By March 2014 **882 Keystone Trees** had been completed (73.5% of the 1,200 target).

Wood-pasture Restoration and other woodland work

16. The wood-pasture restoration work continued across selected areas within the 15 target compartments of the 38 Forest compartments. In one such compartment, Lords Bushes (Comp 32), wood-pasture work entered its 11th year and just over 0.5 hectares of small trees of Holly and Birch were cleared in 3 areas around ancient Oaks and Hornbeams and many new Hornbeam pollards were created. This haloing work has been shown (by an MSc research project) to be the most effective way of restoring and maintaining ancient Oak condition by providing them with more light. The positive impact of the Lords Bushes work, conserving the ancient Oaks, was reported as part

of a presentation at the annual conference of the Ancient Tree Forum (see also above in *Keystone Trees* section).

17. The pollarding and re-pollarding of ancient Hornbeam pollards was completed as planned in the following areas: Deershelter Plain, above Debden Slade, alongside the Bury Wood surfaced rides, Pole Hill, Lords Bushes, Gilbert's Slade/Walthamstow Forest.
18. The annual Scout Project 824, supported by the Epping Forest arborists and Grassland Team, also worked in the core wood-pasture restoration areas clearing around Hornbeam pollards along Jubilee Ride in Bury Wood and by the Cuckoo Brook and at the heathland of Long Running east.
19. In the wood-pasture restoration and pollarded areas, especially in Bury Wood, re-growing bramble and vegetation was cut and flailed as part of a systematic maintenance programme by the Operations Teams to maintain the grassy sward and openness of the areas.
20. Clearance of trees around the Highams Park Dam began in January 2013 and created space for the new dam shape and the planned engineering works. The important colony of Moschatel – a scarce woodland plant - was marked off so that any damage was avoided during the operation.
21. The final successful inductions of the arborist apprentices took place during this year under the *Branching Out* Project with the 13th, 14th and 15th starting in October 2013.

Gifford's Wood

22. This year saw the successful planting of Gifford's Wood, with funds from the Lord Mayor's Appeal 2013 (over £75,000), with additional donations of £5,600 made directly to Epping Forest for Gifford Wood and a grant of over £20,000 from the Woodland Grant Scheme. The newly-acquired fields at Upshire were prepared for tree-planting during the year with the first three trees planted by Lord Mayor Gifford, his wife Lady Mayoress Clare Gifford and Alderman Gordon Haines, accompanied by the Chairman and Superintendent on 28 January 2013.
23. During November 2013, 30 local school-children and over 100 community volunteers helped to plant 2000 infant trees as part of the project. The school children enjoyed a lesson in tree species, delivered by FSC and the community planting day was only possible due to the hard work of the Friends of Epping Forest. In addition to tree-planting two ponds were also restored and a new waymarked trail was installed with the help of the scouts.

Tree safety survey and hazard removal work

24. The tree hazard survey was completed along the roads and main boundaries in the Forest and also the whole of the Buffer Land Estate boundaries were surveyed for the first time.
25. Over 300 identified hazards within trees were worked on by arborist staff in the areas of highest priority (red zones) along roads as well as the unsurfaced trails and paths network which had also been surveyed the previous winter.
26. In response to the problems of *Massaria* disease on London Plane Trees all 400-plus trees along the roadside avenues were inspected twice during

summer 2013. In addition there was a training session on *Massaria* for the arborist staff from one of the national experts involved in developing the *Massaria* management protocols for London Tree Officers. Work began on removing affected branches in January 2014 and will become an annual task.

27. In addition, the major **St Jude's storm** in October 2013 caused much extra damage. In just the first two weeks immediately after the storm 260 trees were tackled often in very tricky and hazardous situations. Overall the work generated 182 person days in clearance work, representing over 7% of arborist team time. This event, therefore, had a significant impact on the conservation and habitats work programme with some wood-pasture restoration work postponed until 2014-15.

Grazing infrastructure and cattle

28. The Grazing Strategy elements of the HLF-funded *Branching Out* project began to take shape with the 4 cattle grids being installed by Essex County Council between July and September 2013. The 4 grids installed are at Forest Side (Honey Lane Quarters), Wake Road, Cross Roads (High Beach) and Ranger's Road.
29. The by-pass areas for the grids were dedicated from Forest Land to the use of the highway. Feedback from horse-riders was sought throughout the autumn about the gates and by-pass surfaces. As a result of the feedback, Essex County Council undertook to replace the plastic cell surface of the by-passes with a hoggin surface.
30. In parallel with this work, and part of the same project, the erection of the 4.4 kilometres (km) of wooden fencing alongside the A104 and A121 was completed by December 2013.
31. The *Boviguard* Invisible fencing network at Bury Wood and Hill Wood continued to allow extensive grazing across Fairmead and into Bury Wood, with Red Poll cattle (a rare conservation breed) grazing there for the first time. The English Longhorns grazed at Chingford Plain and on the heathlands.
32. Further development of the system continued with testing of wire loops of twice the length of the original specification – up to 4km. New 35% lighter collar units, 120 of them, were also purchased from the manufacturer at discount wholesale prices, with a 60% grant from Natural England.
33. A prolonged tendering process for the construction of the Great Gregories cattle out-wintering facilities meant that a contingency arrangement had to be made with a set of straw pens being created in a nearby field for the winter, consented by the Environment Agency and Natural England.
34. The Longhorns produced 9 and the Red Poll 18 calves by January 2014.

Grassland Mowing and other open sites work

35. Volunteer work continued at **Fernhills** with additional work being carried out in February 2014 by operations staff clearing the 17-year old fence-line in preparation for fence replacement and repairs.

36. The Grassland Team continued the conservation mowing work late into the autumn and early winter to complete all the sites with **Wanstead Flats** being the last site finished in early December as part of this area's ongoing late-cutting rotation to maintain the finer acid grassland.

Scrub Management & control

37. *Project Nightingale* continued as in previous years, involving many volunteer hours as well as staff time. New coppicing work was carried out at **Pole Hill** amongst other sites.
38. The Grassland Team carried out winter scrub clearance work in the smaller fields and along the edges of **Sheppard's Meadows** to combat the continued rapid bramble growth and to extend the area which the mowing equipment can reach in future years at this flower-rich site.

Wetland Management

39. At Wanstead Flats the re-design and restoration of **Jubilee Pond** and the construction of the easy-access pathway around it were completed during the year, working with the City Surveyor's Department.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

40. There are no further implications to highlight as this report is a summary of completed operations as part of a long-term management plan with a programme that was approved by Committee on 13th May 2013.

Conclusions

41. There were many highlights and milestone achievements in this year's work programme with thousands of trees planted for the establishment of Gifford's Wood and the completion of Jubilee Pond and its access path amongst them. The habitat and grazing work was supported by very significant grant income. Weather continued to dominate the work programme, as it had in 2012, but this time as the result of a major storm event – St Jude's Storm. The extra tree work had a significant impact on the habitats work programme. Nonetheless, the good summer allowed 152 Keystone trees to be completed and many Hornbeams to be re-pollarded, continuing the restoration of Epping Forest's internationally-important wood-pasture and ancient tree habitats.

Background Papers:

- *Epping Forest Annual Work Programme for access and habitats 2013-14. Report to EF&C Committee 13th May 2013 (SEF 13/13).*
- *The Epping Forest Management Plan 2004 – 2010*
- *The Barn Hoppitt Wood-pasture Restoration Plan 2006 – 2011*
- *The Lords Bushes & Knighton Woods Integrated Site Plan 2004 – 2010*
- *The Wanstead Flats Integrated Site Plan 2006 – 2011*
- *Branching Out Project Plan (Nov 2008) (Chapters 15: Keystone Trees Strategy and 16: Grazing Strategy)*
- *Environmental Stewardship guidelines (Natural England)*

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