

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	11/05/2015
Subject: Epping Forest Management Plan (Phase 1 Consultation)	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 19/15	For Decision

Summary

A new Management Plan is required to guide the future management of Epping Forest, following the expiry of the previous plan in 2010. The inherent value of engaging with interested parties during the early stages of the plan's development has been recognised in previous reports.

Subject to approval, a comprehensive consultation will take place in the summer of 2015 to capture the thoughts, views and ideas of community groups, members of the public and stakeholders on the management issues faced by the Conservators. This consultation will give the Conservators a greater understanding of the management priorities for the Forest over the next 10 year period from the perspective of our stakeholders and visitors.

27 draft sections of the Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 document were presented to and approved by your Committee in July 2013, subject to minor amendments. The remaining 64 sections were presented to the Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group for discussion in March 2015. This report presents the final draft of all sections, following amendments recommended by the Steering Group, to your Committee for discussion and approval, allowing for progress in the most expedient manner so as not to miss the vital summer engagement window.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve the text for public consultation as per the Epping Forest draft Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 document (Appendix 3)
- Agree the timetable for consultation as per Appendix 1

Main Report

Background

1. A new Management Plan is required for Epping Forest, as the previous plan expired in 2010. The Conservators of Epping Forest seek to engage with stakeholders and the public during the early stages of developing the new plan.

2. The consultation will capture the ideas, thoughts and views of community groups, members of the public and stakeholders on the numerous and varied 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.
3. Early consultation is a proven method to garner support and build confidence in the overall management approach. The approval by your Committee (5 March 2012) of the Statement of Community Involvement outlined a commitment to effective and meaningful consultation.
4. Management policies that have been the subject of widespread and demonstrable public consultation have a greater opportunity of future adoption within Local Planning Authority Local Development Plan documents.
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 they have less free time to commit to the consultation process.
6. There are more opportunities in summer when Officers can promote the consultation by 'piggybacking' at local events, fairs and shows (see Appendix 1).
7. Report SEF 28/09, approved by your Committee on 9 November 2009, outlined the format and timetable for the production of the new Management Plan, including the proposal to undertake a comprehensive pre-draft consultation with community groups, stakeholders and members of the public.
8. The timescale for this consultation was postponed by report SEF 30/13, approved by your Committee on 8 July 2013. This report agreed that consultation would take place from August to November 2013. This timetable has not been achieved due to demands on staff time.
9. A comprehensive consultation on management issues is therefore proposed for community groups, members of the public and stakeholders in summer 2015.

Current Position

10. Much work has gone into drafting the Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 document. A robust structure has been formed, based on the six key duties within the Epping Forest Acts. The structure refers to six themes, 58 management issues and 13 common strands.
11. 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.
12. The six themes are based on the duties of the Conservators as outlined by the Epping Forest Acts. The complexity of managing the Forest means that there are

58 management issues, divided between the six themes, to convey (Appendix 2). The document is content heavy and contains complex subjects, so this structure has been designed to make the information as accessible as possible.

13. 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. It is on these management issues that the thoughts and opinions of our stakeholders and users will be sought.
14. The document also refers to strands. These are broader in spectrum, normally with one or more strand being applicable to each management issue. These allow the Conservators to apply legislation and wider departmental and corporate objectives found in the Open Spaces Business Plan 2014-2017 and the City Together Strategy to each management issue.
15. The strands cover the following topics, as illustrated in Appendix 2: resources and finances, visitor experience, sustainability, health and safety, outreach, lifelong learning, equality, training, accessibility, volunteering, public involvement, communications, information and marketing, and partnerships.
16. 27 sections, including all six theme introductions, nine management issues and 12 strand explanations, were approved with comments by both the Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group and your Committee in July 2013. The recommended amendments have been incorporated.
17. Drafts of the remaining 49 management issues were presented to the Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group in March 2015. In addition, those draft sections which had changed significantly following your Committee's comments, including the 13 strand explanations, one management issue and one theme introduction, were also presented, totalling 64 sections.
18. Following comments from the Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group, amendments to the Management Plan Phase 1 Consultation document (Appendix 3) have been made, including:
 - a. Changes to the body of the text have been made in line with comments and suggestions from the Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group.
 - b. Commonalities in proposals for different management issues have been streamlined and the document has been reviewed to ensure the use of 'Plain English' throughout.
 - c. An introduction and a glossary have been added to the document.
 - d. Three management issues dealing with the Conservators' statutory duties have been amended to present the issue 'for information'. Stakeholders and users are still invited to comment on the importance of the issue and have the opportunity to provide any additional thoughts, but are not being consulted on those proposals that the Conservators are legally obliged to implement. This change clarifies the scope of the consultation for participants.

- e. Management issue 4.8 concerning dogs has been moved to Theme 1: Public recreation and enjoyment.
 - f. Management issue 3.8 concerning protected species has been moved to Theme 2: Preservation of the natural aspect. Additionally, the management issues in this theme have been reordered (see Appendix 2).
 - g. Following a local meeting, significant changes have been made to management issues 2.1 on habitat management, 2.2 on wood-pasture, 2.3 on grazing, 2.6 on high forest, 2.7 on low forest and scrub and 2.8 on the Warren Plantation.
 - h. Management issues 2.4 on grasslands and heathlands and 2.9 on wetland habitats have been added.
19. Final drafts of all six theme introductions, 58 management issues and 13 strands have now been completed.
20. A web-based consultation software, INOVEM Consult, has been procured to facilitate undertaking a consultation of this size.
21. INOVEM Consult allows individuals to select the themes or management issues which they are interested in from an interactive menu. To encourage consultees to respond to the wider document, Officers will use interactive cross-referencing, encouraging responses to associated management issues.
22. Officers have already utilised INOVEM Consult to facilitate several smaller public consultations. The system has been well received by consultees and many stakeholders have set up accounts, which will enable us to target certain user groups with specific sections of the consultation.
23. Officers have conducted a trial using several of the management issues, creating a mock consultation using INOVEM. This was tested by Officers in May 2015. Members of your Committee will be sent a link to the test in advance of this meeting.
24. A new Management Plan engagement plan has been developed, which would see the public consultation taking place between 22 June and 14 September 2015 (Appendix 1). This time period falls over the summer engagement window and includes several high profile local events which can be used to promote the consultation.

Options

25. Option 1: Approve the revised timetable for the development of the Epping Forest Management Plan, including the period of public consultation as per Appendix 1. Approve the text of the Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 document (Appendix 3) for public consultation. Costs associated with raising awareness of the Management Plan (as per Appendix 1) and analysing the results will be met from the local risk budget. This option would be an outward expression of the Conservators' commitment to caring for the Forest and involving the public in its management and meet the Epping Forest Statement of Community Involvement. This option is therefore **recommended**.

26. Option 2: Do not approve the revised timetable or the draft Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 document. This option would delay the development of a new Management Plan for the Forest further and is therefore **not recommended**.

Proposals

27. Subject to approval, the Epping Forest Management Plan Phase 1 consultation will take place over a 12 week period from 22 June 2015 to 14 September 2015 in line with the Statement of Community Involvement.
28. In addition, notice of the consultation will be given at least 4 weeks prior to the beginning of the consultation period, both online and in the press.
29. Throughout both the notice period and the consultation period, staff will raise awareness of the consultation in a wide variety of ways, including paid advertisements, visitor engagement and a social media campaign, as outlined in Appendix 1. Staff and volunteers will also maintain a presence at a series of local events to raise awareness among the wider community.
30. The results will be periodically monitored using INOVEM throughout the consultation. At the end of the consultation period, the results will be fully analysed and a consultation report produced and presented to the next meeting of your Committee.
31. Following discussion by your Committee, Officers will use the results of the consultation to inform the preparation of the draft Management Plan for Epping Forest in line with the revised schedule.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

32. **City Together Strategy:** The Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 meets the vision of the City Together Strategy of the City of London as the Heart of a World Class City which protects, promotes and enhances our environment.
33. **Corporate Plan 2013-17:** The Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 meets the objective of the Corporate Plan to provide valued services to London and the nation.
34. **Open Spaces Business Plan 2014-17:** The Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 meets the third management priority in the Open Spaces Business Plan, to deliver the Epping Forest Management Plan. It also meets the strategic objective of 'widening and developing what we offer to Londoners through education, biodiversity and volunteering' and is in line with the departmental value of 'inclusion'.
35. **Statement of Community Involvement:** The City of London has committed to consulting on the forthcoming Management Plan throughout the production of the plan, including in the early stages of preparation, in Epping Forest's Statement of Community Involvement.

Implications

36. **Legal** - Section 2 of the Epping Forest Act 1878 and 1880 require the Forest to be managed and regulated. A publically accessible management plan is a key outward expression of this responsibility.
37. While it is good practice to consult with communities and, as a charity, engage with our beneficiaries, there is no legal responsibility placed on the Conservators to carry out a consultation when drafting a management plan. It is, however, required, under the Town and County Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended by the Localism Act 2010 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2012), to enable elements of the plan to be potentially adopted within the Development Plan Document Frameworks of the neighbouring local authorities. This would support the Conservators in the effective regulation and management of the Forest.
38. **Financial** – INOVEM Consult, the online consultation platform that will be used in the consultation process, has already been procured. The annual fee for continued use, support and maintenance is £7,500, which is met from the local risk budget.
39. There will be some costs associated with raising awareness of the consultation, totalling approximately £16,200. This will be met from the local risk budget.
40. The Management Plan Consultation Phase 1 will require significant staff time. Any additional staff costs will also be met from the local risk budget.

Conclusion

41. 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.
42. Demonstrable public engagement with a wide range of the charity's beneficiaries will help inform policy development and prioritisation, while also providing the best opportunity for wider adoption by partner authorities.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Stakeholder analysis and engagement plan
- Appendix 1 – Draft structure of the Epping Forest Management Plan Phase I Consultation
- Appendix 3 – Draft Management Plan Phase 1 Consultation document

Background Papers

March 2013, 'Epping Forest Management Plan (Phase 1 Consultation)' – Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group

'SEF 30/13: Epping Forest Management Plan (Phase 1 Consultation)' – Epping Forest and Commons Committee

July 2013, 'Epping Forest Management Plan Phase 1 Consultation' – Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group

March 2012, 'Statement of Community Involvement – Update' – Epping Forest and Commons Committee

'SEF 22/11: Epping Forest Statement of Community Involvement' – Epping Forest and Commons Committee

'SEF 28/09: Epping Forest Management Plan 2011 – 2021. Consultation and Publication Timetable' – Epping Forest and Commons Committee

Town and County Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended by the Localism Act 2010 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2012)

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