

Epping Forest Joint Consultative Committee

Inspiring environmental understanding through first-hand experience



Epping Forest Field Centre



The Centre is managed by FSC for, and on behalf of, the City of London

Head of Centre’s report on Epping Forest Field Centre activity in 2015

The purpose of this report is to inform the Joint Committee of performance in relation to the delivery of the City of London’s environmental learning service in Epping Forest in 2015; I recommend that the report be RECEIVED.

Providing diverse, accessible and valuable high quality provision

A wide range of courses designed to encourage lifelong enjoyment of, and care for, the Forest and the natural world, was delivered in 2015. Once again this was to very diverse economic and ethnic/social groups with more than half of the Centre’s audience coming from the City and Greater London. The profile was very similar to that illustrated in the report on 2014. Increased promotion of Epping Forest as ‘a wonderful place for discovery and learning’ and raising service user awareness of the City/FSC partnership was an increasingly important theme in 2015. (This will be extended to Family courses in 2016).

New courses for adult learners in 2016 included *Woodland and Forest Bird Song* and *Wildlife Photography with Birds of Prey*. Subsidised learners in 2016 comprised:

- the third annual ‘Loughton Big Family Pond Dip’ ‘taking learning to the learners’ and connecting families with their local part of EF (funded by Loughton Town Council)
- a *Key Stage 4 Visitor Impact* day for Forest Gate school students (funded by FSC Bursary)
- a family Bioblitz event (funded by the Associates of EFFC)
- a *Summer Wonderland* SEN event (funded by Haslers accountancy firm).

Performance data and Income & Expenditure

Indicator	2013	2014	2015
Paid for learner experiences #	19,640	20,961	19,480
Subsidised learner experiences #	2,664	115	114
Learners	20,590	18,470	17,200
Income from courses	£ 280,652	£297,725	£292, 923
Meeting or exceeding expectations of service users	99.2%	98.9%	99.6%
Increasing environmental understanding	97.8%	98.8%	99.2%

# Some learners come on more than one day eg separate adult courses or a five day A level course

The financial outturn will be broadly in line with the 2015 estimates that were accepted by the JCC in 2014. It is anticipated that the final audited accounts will be available in April/May 2016. In the interim indicative 2015 figures are presented with the 2016 estimates for contextualisation in a following report.

## **Developing networks, partnerships and support**

The Centre continues to benefit from ever strengthening mutual support across the FSC London Region and continues to participate in the Epping Forest Learning Providers Forum with colleagues from the City, Centenary Trust and Suntrap.

In March, following the inaugural courses last year, we delivered a second geography fieldwork course for the Consortium for the School Centred Initial Teacher Training (Essex) with 16 trainee teachers in attendance. In May we held a 'Teacher Advisory Group' meeting; a focus group of education professionals volunteering their time to support development at EFFC. It was very helpful and we hope to repeat this in 2017.

The Centre continues to maintain very good community links. There is ongoing dialogue with several local networks and organisations to explore opportunities that might help to develop and sustain FSC's work in Epping Forest. The Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre membership continues to build and we have worked effectively with the Associates to foster support for the work of the Centre. We have collaborated locally on a funded project that, if successful, will deliver a range of activities, including 'well being walks' and natural arts/video/photo exhibitions for young people and adults with special needs.

Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) currently parks its community transport minibus at the Centre when it is not use. VAEF benefits from free parking and reduced risk of vandalism. EFFC benefits from a very visible commitment to working in partnership and with the community and from the ability to use this vehicle free of charge for adult courses where transport is required which supports customer care and carbon reduction.

Volunteer recruitment continues with help from VAEF with 11 regular, active volunteers supporting us in 2015.

## **Meeting the challenges of curriculum change.**

EFFC learning provision closely reflects the new Curriculum as well as incorporating resources and pedagogies trialed in our *Learning for Biodiversity*, *Discovering Epping Forest* and *Lessons from Nature* projects. Provision for secondary schools has been carefully thought through following very active participation in FSC training at national, regional and local level. The team is very confident that it is well prepared to meet the challenges of curriculum change. Teachers have offered range responses in relation to what curriculum reform means in terms of future use of EFFC services with some very positive, a few negative and some with a fair amount uncertainty.

## **Microscopes**

Ken Adams, longstanding Associate Tutor, very generously donated £9,000 (plus gift aid) to purchase high spec microscopes for FSC Epping Forest. Ken has recognised that, whilst this sort of specialist equipment has been impossible to fund in other ways in recent years, it is crucial to maintaining the capabilities and reputation of EFFC to host advanced level taxonomic courses. This is hugely appreciated and will make a crucial difference to ensuring that proper taxonomic learning remains a very important and permanent part of the ongoing provision of this Centre. These will be used for advanced taxonomic courses and for specific microscopy courses. Our older lower spec microscopes can now be used more sacrificially to add value to more existing courses.

## **Fire Risk Assessment**

As part of FSC's Charity wide risk management strategy, Fire Safety Consultant, Jamie Davis, undertook a follow up fire risk assessment (FRA) on 29 April along the lines of the 2012 FRA reported to the Committee. No significant unmanaged risks to life were identified. City contractors have largely addressed the key remedial action points.

## **ICT**

The acquisition of iPads from the beginning of 2015 has helped with productivity, collecting and sharing digital images, using social media and, most importantly, enhancing learning and teaching. David Morgan

(FSC Technology in Learning Officer) visited EFFC in May to observe teaching and advise on ICT use to support learning. David was able to provide some tips on how we can use our existing technology resources and has offered us, on long term loan, a class set of tablets to trial FNS (Field Network Systems) to support data collection in the field.

### **Quality Badge Plus and Eco Centre accreditation**

In June the Centre was assessed for Quality Badge Plus – the summary report is included as an appendix.

Eco-Centre accreditation at the end of December 2014 (and the QB + assessment) confirms ongoing action and progress relating to the management of the environmental impacts of the Centre's operations and to supporting the development of positive attitudes and behaviour in relation to Epping Forest and the natural world.

### **Preparedness for the future**

The Centre will enter 2016 in with a very strong client base and has the capabilities to continue to meet or exceed expectations. Maintaining this base, alongside exploring new income opportunities, will be vital in ensuring that EFFC operations are sustainable.

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