

# 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 the Epping Forest Field Centre Plan for 2016

The following 2016 Epping Forest Field Centre Plan is presented to the Committee FOR APPROVAL.

### Epping Forest Field Centre (EFFC) 2016 Plan

This overview Plan comprises:

- Background
- Objectives
- 2016 income and expenditure estimates – presented to the JCC in a following paper
- Aspirations and ideas for development

EFFC has been managed by FSC for, and on behalf of, the City of London from its establishment in 1971. The Centre promotes Epping Forest as '*a wonderful place for discovery and learning*'. Learning experiences at EFFC are designed to encourage lifelong enjoyment of, and care for, the Forest and the natural world. Careful evaluation, undertaken with external funding in previous years, has shown that EFFC's learning provision for schools achieves these aims and also boosts attainment.

The Centre will enter 2016 with a very strong client base mainly from (Greater) London 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. Flexibility and diversity of provision have been crucial in making progress at EFFC in the past. They will remain important factors in the light of the ongoing impacts of curriculum reform, the evolving plans of the FSC London Region and changes in City funding and this is reflected in this Plan. Curriculum reform has brought new challenges but there is cause for optimism including stated teacher intentions to return in 2016 and a reported increase of 13% uptake in Advanced level Geography. Curriculum reform brings opportunities for non-residential course provision. Further background detail and evaluation that informs this Plan is contained in a range of documents – please ask the Head of Centre if you wish to view these.

Analysis indicates that

- a record level of course income is achievable in 2016 with costs and resources broadly in line with those of 2014 and 2015
- further cost cutting would reduce income generation capacity and surplus

Risk management **in 2016** will focus on:

- maintaining excellent standards of health & safety, child protection and operations to maintain the reputation of the Centre and stakeholders
- ensuring the financial viability of core services and maintaining flexibility and a wide range of services to cope with changes to the operating environment and markets
- providing excellent customer care, optimise repeat visits/referrals
- maintaining continuous improvement and responding imaginatively to challenges/opportunities
- ensuring sensible exit strategies for any new developments/projects utilising external grants

As always staffing remains the crucial controllable determinant of income as well as expenditure. It is also the resource that determines the degree of success in the delivery of mission and achievement of the objectives in this Plan; retention and successful succession planning will continue to be of crucial importance. As at December 2015 the new staff team was very positive about its ability to deliver this Plan.

## Our objectives for 2016

### *Extending Opportunities:*

- Reach 17,000 (non-residential) learners delivering 20,000 learner experiences to diverse audiences (BME, EAL and 'free schools meals' students) that are predominantly from London

### *Integrated Networks with access to all:*

- Collaborate to build the cohesion within FSC London Region and its connectivity with other FSC Units and Regions.

### *Inspire through quality support resources:*

- Utilise our continuous improvement processes to ensure high quality courses and resources and continue the development of web content
- Maintain the Centre grounds for wildlife, learning and enjoyment and transform the raised beds

### *Exceed or match the expectations of >90% of customers:*

- Benchmark service user feedback against 2015 data and continue to exceed the FSC KPI for meeting needs and continue to address any issues identified as part of current practices
- Ensure that our learning provision continues to engender enjoyment and discovery learning, consistently adopts best practice (including QB plus improvement points – notably a high pace of learning and effective AfL for all learners) and meet changing demands from schools
- Ensure compliance and continue to meet 100% of the requirements of the Safety Shield Gold standard
- Continue to meet the requirements of IIP, ensuring an effective staff & volunteer team with a commitment to an exceptional level of performance, development and continuous improvement
- Collaborate effectively with City of London officers in relation to maintenance of the facilities and improvements to environmental impacts and the improvement of the toilet facilities for adults where feasible
- Address, as appropriate, the improvement points from the QB plus report (as per Appendix B)
- Use Poll Daddy software to improve data collection and evaluation from service users
- Make specific reference to Quality Badge improvement points in Quarterly reports to FSC HO

### *Overcoming barriers to First hand experiences:*

- Regain momentum with the use of social media and increase followers, continuously improve web content and ensure that we continue to increase web 'hits' (with search engine optimisation)
- Seek support for marketing and publicity from appropriate City and FSC HO staff especially in relation to the promotion of the value of our service to key City/FSC audiences

### *Partnerships with others:*

- Collaborate effectively with the City of London to ensure optimal short, medium and long term support
- Liaise with Voluntary Action Epping Forest, City of London and other partners to share ideas and to seek continued improvements in the relation to support for and benefits from volunteers
- Respond effectively to any new protocols for reporting to JCC, Head of Region and to FSC at Corporate level (QB plus improvement point)
- Collaborate with Stakeholders to develop a clearly articulated dynamic long-term vision future for the Centre to build upon the evolving aspirations and planning frames of the City and of the FSC London Region (QB plus improvement point)

### *Ability to Invest for the future:*

- Constrain expenditure and achieve forecast income including £300,000 in course income
- Work effectively with the Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre to foster meaningful support for the work of the Centre the delivery of the Associate's Plan including the utilisation of the new potentially income generating 'Official Sponsor' category of membership

### *Environmental/Greening the Business:*

- Maintain our commitment to the effective management of our environmental impacts, (keeping this on the agenda for the weekly staff meeting, and continue to explore PIRs and LEDs as part of our strategy to reduce carbon emissions)

### *Staff Training and personal development:*

- *Develop and deliver a Learning and Development Plan that ensures compliance, develops capability and underpins the effective delivery of this plan and meets the standards of IIP*

These broad Objectives are underpinned by three Key Area Plans (Learning Provision, Systems Plan and Communications) and by supporting Theme Plans and Personal Action Plans that contain significantly more detail and refer to staff allocation, prioritisation, timescales, resource allocation, measurement and learning and development needs. A detailed Action Plan has also been accepted by the Head of FSC London Region for inclusion in the Regional Action Plan.

## Aspirations and ideas for development

There is a pressing need to focus on the current viability of core business and to ensure the future viability of the Centre. Flexibility is important in relation to development work. There is an aspiration to make good use of the Centre's heritage, resources and emerging ideas by exploring some of the ideas below in 2016 and beyond. However they do not form part of the core Plan. There is little point spending considerable time on the things that are not going to ensure viability, especially when efficiency savings made in recent years leave a very tight budget. For these reasons no specific expenditure/resource has been allocated for these developments. Precisely what is attempted and achieved will depend upon resource availability and dynamic prioritisation accounting for reputation and viability.

### Development

- Find new ways to foster the longstanding FSC/City of London partnership
- Collaborate with City colleague to identify how we can do more to showcase Epping Forest as a special place with special features
- Give some additional attention to Family courses – schools provision has been our focus in recent years (as stated in plans); we hope to find time to make these courses more vibrant
- Seek additional funding that would take forward aspirations for 'inspired by Epping Forest' (arts) provision
- Make a step change in the use of ICT in the field and move EFFC to being 'leading edge' in this area
- Establish a 'You Tube' channel for movie content relating to our learning provision
- Continue to explore the possible provision of new features in the Centre's grounds (viewing platform, low ropes course, improved access to wheelchair path and pond complex) - subject to permissions and feasibility
- Explore PIRs and LEDs as part of our strategy to reduce carbon emissions

### Build on Project legacies

Take forward the legacies (courses & resources, pedagogies, operating systems, learning sites, audiences, partnerships) from 'Sustainable Schools', 'Lessons from Nature', 'Learning for Biodiversity for Londoners' and 'Discovering Epping Forest' in core work and in new projects that might include:

- link more of our learning outcomes to learning for the Forest and the natural world and from the Forest and the natural world to inform thinking about how products and production systems could work better in the human world
- significantly increasing biological monitoring and recording and the utilisation of this important data
- provide learning and development relating to survey and monitoring techniques
- generate citizen science to help inform forest management contribute to ispot, OPAL and BIG DATA
- acquire additional microscopes build EFFC's reputation for microscopy/taxonomy
- build on EFFC's reputation for freshwater ecology, biodiversity and taxonomic learning at all levels
- ensure the conservation of the existing ponds at EFFC and the habitats of the very significant populations of great crested newts (as per the reports of Dr Laurence Jarvis) for ecological reasons and to ensure that we have an outdoor classroom for teaching freshwater ecology and sustaining teaching activities (KPI)
- create an additional pond (or pond complex) at the Centre
- continue to offer amphibian courses to professionals, families, university students, school students
- offer a new pond discovery course developed for 'DEF 2'
- extend use of our Field Network Systems (FNS) -connectivity for data recording, presentation analysis in the field and for contributing to the collation of 'big data' at UK level

### Galvanising external support/ engaging the commercial sector

Allied to ongoing improvements in marketing (content marketing, increased web and social media activity, video clips, customer relationship management, whole staff engagement and highlighting signposting the City visits fund and FSC Bursaries) there is an aspiration to develop development EFFC support network. Building towards the 50th anniversary of the Centres operations in 2021, the intention is to raise the profile of EFFC especially with the commercial sector. We hope to galvanise existing and new supporters to accelerate this.

It is hoped that Eleanor Laing, MP has agreed to launch and to promote a new 'Official Sponsor of the Associates of Epping Forest Field Centre' membership category of EFFC's supporter group.

At just £120 pa we hope that Official Sponsor membership will be attractive. Official Sponsors will be able to use the Associates logo & statement and to display a certificate. They will also be referenced on the Associates website, on a poster in the EFFC entrance hall and on social media. Official Sponsors could be families, individuals or organisations but the key target is the commercial sector.

The intention is to find ways to exceed the expectations of those that become Official Sponsors, foster mutually valuable partnerships and enlist new advocates. This is part of a wider aspiration for EFFC to engage more fully with businesses to offer:

- Marketing and publicity opportunities aligned to sponsorship that could provide excellent value for money returns from existing commercial sector marketing budgets
- Corporate social responsibility opportunities
- Workforce learning experiences (corporate fun days, team building, workforce CSR events, workforce environmental learning experiences and learning and development for management and for sustainability)
- Partnership working in relation to business and community links (wider community, school and family outreach or Centre based learning activities)
- Venue hire

Engaging the commercial sector is potentially the best prospect for EFFC to generate additional net income to sustain its activities in its second half century.

### **Recommendation**

I would welcome questions and recommend that this Plan be approved.

### **Contact:**

Steve Bunce  
020 8502 8500  
stevebunce.ef@field-studies-council.org