

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons	14 May 2012
Subject: EPPING FOREST ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME for Access & Habitats 2012-13	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 12/12	For Decision
<u>Summary</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Annual Work programme for Epping Forest is drawn from the Epping Forest Management Plan, which was approved by your Committee in 2004 and covers the period April 2012 to March 2013 inclusive; • this work programme is drawn from the Epping Forest Management Plan and subsequent strategy documents and covers both access and habitats management,; • the projects are listed under the 4 key objectives in the Plan – <i>Access, Trees, Open Land and Wetlands</i>, that cover the access, tree safety and habitat conservation operations; • the work on the individual veteran pollards identified as <i>Keystone Trees</i> is supported with a 74% grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the <i>Branching Out</i> Project and with additional match funding from The Tubney Charitable Trust; • this year the <i>Keystone Tree</i> work, by agreement with HLF and Natural England, will be limited and reviewed dependent on tree responses to the winter drought conditions; • the remainder of the habitats work programme continues to be supported by an Environmental Stewardship grant from Natural England across both the Forest and its Buffer Lands. This grant will provide in excess of £162,000 this coming year, with additional capital grants available to cover specific works.; • as in previous years the predominant conservation operations are wood-pasture restoration and grassland management. 	
Recommendations	
It is recommended that:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you approve the Annual Work Programme as summarised in the main report and set out in detail in Appendix 1. 	

Main Report

Background

1. This report and its Appendix 1 provide details of projects where significant operations are proposed for access and the conservation of specific habitats in the Forest for the year 2012 – 13.
2. The programme is drawn from the Epping Forest Management Plan 2010, approved in 2004. Background details of the proposed projects can be found in the Management Plan 2010, updated with the additional projects in 2007. Further details can be found in other planning documents and strategies listed below under '*Background Papers*'.

Current Position

3. This year the habitats work programme is again supported financially by Natural England through its Stewardship Scheme with an annual combined grant of over £162,000, not including additional payments for capital works that are also available and that amounted to over £20,000 in 2011 - 2012.
4. The management of most of the grasslands in the Forest and on the Buffer Lands is now covered by payments under the Entry Level Scheme (ELS). 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 (Project Nightingale).
5. The “*Keystone trees*” arboricultural conservation work, along with proposed works to support the re-establishment of grazing, are supported with a 74% grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with further matched-funding from The Tubney Charitable Trust, as a significant part of the on-going *Branching Out* Project. This project is currently in Year 3 of 5 and is exactly on target with 53% of trees managed in 53% of the time, The work will enter Year 4 of the grant support in November 2012.
6. **Additional conservation team:** The HLF and Tubney Charitable Trust support, by providing 3 apprentices and a Team Supervisor, enables an extra arborist team (4 staff) to be deployed in the Forest.
7. **Staff and volunteers:** This report includes work to be carried out by your own staff, the principal projects of the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV), Epping Forest Centenary Trust

(EFCT) and other volunteers (organised by the Volunteer Development Officer) as well as projects identified for external contractors.

8. **Scout Project:** this year the Scout Project will be carrying out 3 habitat conservation tasks. The sites involved are i) Woodchip Ride, near Loughton Camp – restoring ride-side flora including Heather; ii) Bury Wood along the Jubilee Ride opening up by removing small Holly around veteran pollards; iii) Bulrush Pond – removing alien pond plants as in the previous 2 years.
9. **Apprenticeships:** During this year the third group of 3 apprentice arborists are expected to complete their NVQ2 qualification and further 3 new apprentices will be appointed during August/September 2012 in partnership with **Capel Manor College**. By the end of this year, therefore, the apprenticeship scheme should have provided training and mentoring for **12 apprentices** and given them important qualifications and the widest possible range of arboricultural work experiences. The feedback from all 3 groups of apprentices trained so far has been very positive and this year's group have already achieved their chainsaw qualifications (NPTC CS30 and 31).

Proposals

10. The proposals for this financial and operational year have been grouped by Objectives and the details of the work are included in **Appendix 1**. The Compartment numbers are given as Comp 1 etc. in this Appendix along with the place-name. The location of the compartments can be found by reference to the Forest Compartments map at **Appendix 2**.
11. In the *Access* work programme one of the key projects is the ride management work, which is an annual commitment at Epping Forest to ensure that the extensive ride network of over 32 km (20 miles) is maintained to provide a regionally-significant recreational asset for all Forest visitors. This year over 2kms (1¼ miles) or 6% of the network will be completely re-surfaced (see para 13 of Appendix 2).
12. In addition, preparations will be made for erection of the wooden fencing and the extension of the *Invisible Fencing* project (para 40 of Appendix 2) to complement the 4 cattle grids that have been approved by the Secretary of State for Transport.

13. Further access improvements will be made with improved maintenance of the smaller car parks to complement the recent upgrading of the 4 major car parks at Bury Road, the Hunting Lodge, Connaught Water, and High Beach (see paras 1 – 5 of Appendix 1).
14. The *Keystone Trees* work (paras 18 – 21 of Appendix 1), part of the Branching Out Project, may be postponed for this year because of the impact of the previous two dry winters and dry spring 2011. This postponement has been agreed with the Heritage Lottery Fund and Natural England. The work planned will be reviewed and will be dependent upon the assessments of individual tree vitality by the Conservation team.
15. The wood-pasture restoration work (paras 22 – 31 of Appendix 1) will concentrate on two different types of this habitat which Epping Forest supports. Firstly, the densely pollarded areas of Hornbeam in Bury Wood and Walthamstow Forest will see the pollarding of the Hornbeams both consolidated and expanded (para 24 of Appendix 1). Re-pollarding of Hornbeams last pollarded in the 1980s and 1990s will be carried out along with some new areas nearby being restored to the pollarding cycle.
16. Secondly, in the more heathy areas of wood-pasture such as at Rushey and Deershelter Plains, and in the more Oak-dominated Lords Bushes and Barn Hoppitt, haloing work (para 26 of Appendix 1) around the ancient pollards will predominate alongside the opening up of glades for the recovery of the heathland and grassland sward.
17. The tree safety work (para 37 of Appendix 1) reaches a new milestone with the full survey of the surfaced rides having been completed. Work on trees identified for hazard removal or felling will make up a very significant proportion of the spring and summer programmes for the arboricultural teams.
18. In the meantime the survey work (para 35 – 36 of Appendix 1) turns its attention to the entire network of over 64kms (40 miles) of unsurfaced tracks and paths, as well as repeating the annual surveys of the highest priority areas (itself covering more than 400 hectares (over 1,000 acres) of Forest) alongside roads and other key sites.
19. Finally, the grassland work programme (paras 43 – 48 of Appendix 1) is as extensive as ever outside the main grazing areas and continues the careful rotational mowing of large sites like Wanstead

and Leyton Flats as well as many of the smaller greens around the periphery of the Forest from Leytonstone to Upshire.

Financial Implications

20. The work outlined in the proposed work programme is covered by the local risk budget of the Epping Forest Division supplemented by the Single Payment Scheme (SPS). This is further enhanced with targeted grant-aid payments from The Heritage Lottery Fund, The Tubney Charitable Trust and from the government statutory conservation agency Natural England (NE), under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme. In addition to the annual grant from NE there are further capital works grants available to cover work such as Bracken spraying.

Legal Implications

21. The habitats work programme is carried out under the Conservators' powers provided by the Epping Forest Act 1878. Within the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) the programmed work has received the statutory written consent from Natural England under Section 28 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000).

Strategic Implications

City Together

22. The work, proposals and options outlined above meet the *City Together* vision of a *World Class City* and, specifically, 2 of its 5 themes: "A world class City that supports our communities" and "A World Class City which protects, promotes and enhances our environment".

Open Spaces Department Business Plan

23. The proposals and options above follow from 3 of the Open Spaces Department's Strategic Aims of: "providing high quality accessible Open Spaces and services in accordance with nationally recognised standards for the benefit of London and the Nation"; "involving communities in the management of our sites" and "adopting sustainable working practices, promoting the variety of life (biodiversity) and protecting the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations".

Epping Forest Management Plan

24. This report also matches the Epping Forest Vision for the 21st Century, in particular:

- “Epping Forest’s position as a unique and ancient landscape for people and wildlife will be strengthened;
- “The Forest will retain its natural aspect with the diversity of wildlife habitats enhanced and the features of international importance, including its veteran pollards, protected;
- “Epping Forest will be highly valued as part of a larger and fully accessible protected landscape area”.

Consultees and formal SSSI consent for operations

25. Natural England officers have been consulted about this work programme in relation to both the Stewardship Scheme and the *Favourable Condition* of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as required by the UK Government. Natural England has issued its formal consent to this work programme under Section 28E(3)(a) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000).
26. HLF Officers have been consulted and approved the postponement of *Keystone Tree* work should it be considered appropriate.

Conclusions

27. The work outlined above is drawn from the 2004-2010 Epping Forest Management Plan and further documents developed from that Plan (see below). Most of the work is a continuation of projects started in previous years. The work is supported by Natural England, with an annual grant in excess of £162,000 this year plus additional capital works grants, and other significant additional elements are supported by The Heritage Lottery Fund and The Tubney Charitable Trust..
28. In addition to the in-house teams the work programme detailed in this report will involve many hours of volunteer time from volunteers organised by the Volunteer Development Officer (including for the *Branching Out* Project), the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV), Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT), the Scout Association, The Wren Group and other local volunteering initiatives.

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Background Papers:

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 Stage II Project Plan (Nov 2008) (Chapters 15 Keystone Trees Strategy and 16 Grazing Strategy)

Environmental Stewardship guidelines (Natural England)

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