

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	21 05 2017
Subject: Epping Forest Operations Programme for 2017/2018	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 6/17	For Decision
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Summary

This report outlines the conservation, visitor access and risk management projects proposed in the Forest for the year 2017/18.

The dominant theme of the 2017/18 work programme continues to be the grant-funded habitat conservation work, which includes the restoration of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) wood pasture areas. The rate of work remains at an increased level to ensure that the 10-year commitments under Natural England's Higher Level Scheme are met. A substantial increase in the successful 2016 contractor involvement in wood pasture restoration is proposed for 2017.

The key areas of work in the proposed 2017-18 programme, in addition to the wood-pasture restoration, are: consolidating the grazing programme and managing risks - particularly those related to highways woody verge vegetation, fly-tipping, rough sleeping and tree safety. A key risk for the coming year will be the continuing response to tree pests and diseases including Chalara dieback of ash, Ramorum Disease, the worsening situation around Massaria Disease of London Plane, alongside new Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) including Oak Processionary Moth and Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp.

Following a successful contract tendering process in 2015 and 2016 the programme will continue to improve the value for money we achieve using bulk contracts where possible. These contracts are proposed for retendering in 2018/19.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve the annual work programme as summarised in the main report

Main Report

Background

1. This report describes significant conservation, visitor access and risk management projects proposed in the Forest for the programme year 2017-18.
2. The 2017-18 work programme has been prepared drawing on the following resources:
 - 2.1 Epping Forest Management Plan 2010, approved in 2004, and the additional site-specific conservation management plans for Barn Hoppitt, Lords Bushes & Knighton Woods and Wanstead Flats;
 - 2.2 Views About Management – A statement of Natural England’s Views about the management of Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
 - 2.3 Conservation strategies included in the *Branching Out* Project Stage II Plan (Nov 2008) – the Grazing Strategy (and subsequent approved Grazing Expansion Plan) and the Keystone Trees Strategy;
 - 2.4 Highams Park Dam improvement project and reports of the City of London’s Panel Engineer;
 - 2.5 Wanstead Park Conservation Statement (2011)
 - 2.6 Consultations with the Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT) and Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV), Higham Park Snedders, Epping Forest Bridleway Association
 - 2.7 A recent commissioned report entitled: The Topology and Vegetational History of Some Epping Forest Sphagnum Bogs (Adams 2017)

Current Position

3. We are in the ninth year of a 10-year agreement with Natural England for funding the restoration of 390ha of wood-pasture at Epping Forest. Following a review of progress in 2015/16 the City Corporation increased the scale of work from an average of 18 ha to around 26 ha in 2016/17 with the use of contractors. To ensure the City Corporation meets commitments by the end of the agreement the scale of the work for the next two years, 2017 and 2018, will need to be 38 hectares per year.
4. 2015/16 was the first year of this revised target and required increased arborist team time spent on wood-pasture restoration and the consideration of different work methods. During the year we trialled a forestry mulcher which has proved very helpful on the holly-dominated areas. In 2016/17, 8.9 hectares of land was restored utilising the mulcher.
5. During 2016/17, for the first time, Epping Forest Officers worked with three different contractors to help meet the wood-pasture target. Initially there was some apprehension over the use of contractors for an activity that requires

considerable sensitivity and judgement by the operators. However, the quality of the work undertaken has been to a high standard and, as a consequence, four local companies have been identified as capable of delivering this work, who it is felt properly understand the challenge of working in the Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Epping Forest has received good support from the City Procurement Service (CPS) in setting up these contracts to ensure the City Corporation achieves competitive prices for the work

6. Following good contract performance, in line with CPS guidelines, the City Corporation has been able to confirm a three-year agreement with Warren Smith Farming Ltd to undertake the contract side of our grassland and haylage management programme and with Bush Wheeler Services for our roadside hedge and verge management.
7. The proposed 2017/18 programme focuses on ensuring the City Corporation deliver our HLS woodpasture restoration commitments, consolidating the grazing programme and managing risks - particularly those related to highways woody verge vegetation, tree pests and diseases, fly-tipping, rough sleeping and tree safety.
8. Both the grasslands and wood-pasture operations are supported by agri-environment payments from the Rural Payments Agency and Natural England.

Proposals

9. Estates Maintenance Contract (EMC): In partnership with the CPS the City Corporation let two bulk contracts, grass cutting and road verge cutting, on a three-year basis in 2015 and a further Haylage cutting contract in 2016. It is proposed that we continue with these contracts for the 2017/18 year and look to retender them in 2018/19
10. Habitat Conservation Programme 2017 -2018: The key activities of the habitat conservation programme are described below:
11. **Wood-pasture Restoration:** To ensure City Corporation meets the HLS commitments for the Forest the work will be continuing with the annual wood-pasture restoration programme at the enhanced level initiated in 2015/16. In 2017/18 it is planned to work 38 ha within 18 of the 38 Forest compartments. The larger areas of work would take place the following compartments:
 - Gilbert's Slade (Compartment 35)
 - Walthamstow Forest (Compartment 34)
 - Lords Bushes (Compartment 32)
 - Barn Hoppitt (Compartment 29)
 - Bury Wood (Compartment 24)
 - Pillow Mounds & Comical Corner (Compartment 14)
 - Honey Lane Quarters (Compartment 9)
- 11.1 The majority of the wood-pasture restoration work is scheduled to commence from mid-July after the bird breeding season and, following the

tree safety work, and will continue through to March 2018. It is anticipated that it will occupy the Arborist teams for much of that time.

12. **Wood-pasture Maintenance:** Following work to restore areas to wood-pasture, annual maintenance is required to control tree stump regrowth, seedling growth and coarse vegetation, such as brambles. Such work is necessary under the HLS scheme requirements and is undertaken on a 1-2 year rotation depending on the vigour of the local vegetation. In 2017, around 94 ha of cleared wood-pasture will need to be cut with tractor mounted flails and represents an expanding workload for us as we create more newly restored areas each year. It is proposed that this work will largely be undertaken with in-house staff who have the local knowledge and experience of the sites to ensure we get best quality management of this important conservation task.
13. **Bogs:** following a detailed report on the important Epping Forest bogs system, many of which are an integral part of the internationally-protected SAC heath habitats, a programme of work will be discussed with the conservation volunteer groups to enhance their existing efforts on these sites. In addition, the invasive vegetation that has been able to colonise Lodge Road Bog (north) due its recent drying out will be tackled. This bog is the most important site for bog flora in Essex and London. The clay bund has already been improved to protect it from ongoing vandalism and further work will now be carried out to remove invasive reed-mace and rush. Long-term plans will also be drawn up with a view to better control of water levels.
14. **Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)** work: this part of the operational commitment looks likely to increase every year and will be subject to a review as part of the new Management Plan. In the meantime, work will carry on with the control of Floating Pennywort (see Ponds/Lakes below) and a detailed review of any proposed further Rhododendron removal will be placed before your Committee in September. The planned removal of Larch from The Warren Plantation (Compartment 15) will take place in the late summer/autumn of 2017 with tenders from contractors being sought over the summer. The Larch has value although fast-grown and a large part if not all the costs of removal should be covered by its sale value to the future contractor(s).
 - 14.1 An old Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) nest was discovered on the Forest at Trueloves (Blind Lane) (Compartment 17) during the autumn 2016. As a result a Statutory Notice will be issued by the Forestry Commission and insecticide spraying work will be required during May 2017 over a radius of 50m immediately around the nest. Given the arrival of this pest species in the Forest and its likely expansion here the costs of controlling nests is likely to increase. Currently, in the geographical area in which Epping Forest resides control of the nests is a statutory obligation of the landowner with concomitant costs.
15. **Grassland work:** The grassland work will continue across the Forest as in recent years using a similar programme. To help free up staff time to undertake the expanded conservation grassland management work (see Woodpasture Maintenance above) more of the standard agricultural grass cutting work will be

contracted out. The grassland work is supported by the Entry Level Stewardship Scheme funded by Natural England.

16. **Grazing:** the grazing operation is now being run in-house following Committee approval in November 2016 (Report SEF50/16). This year Longhorn cows will return to be grazed over both the Fairmead extensive grazing area and the invisible-fenced Chingford Plain & Bury Wood grazing area. The newly-fenced Trueloves and Fernhills visited by your committee in November 2016 will also be grazed. As in previous years smaller areas at Warren Wood Slope and at the northern heathland sites will also see Longhorn grazing. Just over 20 Longhorn cows will graze the Fairmead and Chingford areas, but over all the Forest sites listed above there will be up to 60 animals grazing. These numbers will increase in future years as the herd grows in size.

16.1 During 2017-18 to provide an area where the cattle can be collected and handled efficiently and safely or even temporarily impounded, if required, we are proposing to enclose Fairmead Car Park with a cleft chestnut post-and-rail fence. The car park will be available for vehicle users except for the occasional times when there is a need to move or handle the cattle. It is proposed that we leave pedestrian entrances un-gated to minimise barriers to visitors and these gaps will be closed with hurdles as and when required.

17. **Buffer Land Fencing:** During 2016 and 2017 repairs to the fencing were undertaken on the buffer lands with the boundary with the M25 particularly reinforced. However, it is evident that the condition of these fences has deteriorated markedly. Much of the fencing was installed at the same time and as a consequence it is deteriorating as a cohort. In seeking external graziers and to make a charge for grazing under an annual grazing licence, the poor condition of the fences is a hindrance or in some cases may even prevent the letting of grazing.

17.1 To progress a phased repair of the fences it is proposed to use the dedicated Warlies budget to finance the repairs to fencing in Warlies during 2017. It is further proposed to undertake the fencing of the Copped Hall Deer Park, which is estimated to cost around £12,000. This site could then be let out under a grazing licence this year for which a grazier has offered £3,400 (covering over 25% of the costs in the first year). With a number of other smaller but vital fencing repair tasks we propose investing a total of £18,500 in essential fence repairs in 2017/18, in addition to the Warlies fencing costs

18. **Ponds/Lakes:** In 2016/17 specialist contractors removed over 40 tonnes of the invasive non-native aquatic weed 'Floating Pennywort' (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) from the Perch Pond at Wanstead Park. The initial clearance was followed up by monthly herbicide treatments of any remaining patches of floating pennywort. This work has been very successful in reducing the prevalence of the weed, however, we expect there will still be colonies of the weed that will need further treatment for the next two years at least.

18.1 Following the re-lining of Jubilee Pond in 2013 a combination of intensive pressure by geese and the effect of wave action have led to the pond liner

becoming exposed through erosion on the margins. This erosion damage is extensive and during 2016/17 two measures enhancing reinforcement of the pond edge were trialled.

18.2 Rock protection of a small section has proved successful and shown that it could be a lasting solution for the pond edge frequented by people. The use of brushwood faggots, obtained from the Forest with the help of the Happy Loppers volunteers, to protect the edge of the islands will take a little longer to demonstrate the success due to the need for natural vegetation to colonise and establish.

18.3 To protect the City's substantial investment in the re-lining of Jubilee pond Epping Forest Officers will work with colleagues from the City Surveyor's Department on how best to take forward the results of the two trial repairs undertaken by Epping Forest teams and volunteers.

19. Visitor Access Management Programme: In addition to at least an annual cut of official bridleways the following specific visitor access works are proposed to take place in the Forest during the year:

19.1 Theydon Bois Green: Working with Theydon Parish Council the landscape infrastructure on the Green will be reviewed along with general site management issues. Some aspects of these were introduced to members of the EFCC attending the November 2016 site visit. During 2017, and following further discussion at an EFCC local meeting, a number of follow up actions to improve the look of the area will be implemented, e.g. standardising the waste bins across the site and improving risk management through relocating benches away from trees that are shedding branches.

19.2 Highams Park: The work started by volunteers from Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT) in 2014 to remove holly and scrub to open views onto the lake and improve access and to reduce competition around Keystone Trees will be continued. In 2017/18, as in previous years, much of the work will be delivered through a volunteer programme with particular support from the 'Highams Park Snedders'. At the request of the Local Planning Authority trees planted as part of the landscaping of the dam improvement works of 2013 and which have died need to be replaced. Agreement has been reached to vary the location of the trees through a revised planting plan that better helps respond to some of the issues being faced following the improvement works, such as planting a hedge to deter people walking up the face of the dam.

19.3 Ride improvements: A volunteer audit of the Forest's rides and paths is planned. This will look specifically at the edge vegetation, path condition, and presence and absence of drainage. This information will allow the production of an improvement and maintenance plan that will more accurately identify the costs for managing the ride and path system. It is anticipated that this work will identify a number of substantive issues and will be brought to the EFCC on completion for further discussion and

consideration. Routine maintenance of path edge vegetation will be continued across the whole network.

19.4 Bollarding Smarts Lane and Queens Greens: In response to increasing parking abuse on Forest Land it is proposed to protect Smarts Lane Green with bollards. The intention is that the bollards used will be a standard suitable for wider application in the Forest and the installation at Smarts Lane Green will be used as a test to gauge the appropriateness for wider adoption in the Forest. One potential location is Queens Green at High Beach where the bollards are deteriorating quickly and will need replacement over the next two years. A temporary fix was achieved as part of the works in response to the recent Royal visit.

19.5 Parkland Plan, Wanstead Park: Development work on the Parkland Plan will continue in 2017/18 with the support of the consultants LDA Design and in conjunction with Heritage management colleagues from the City Surveyors Department. Work on this project has taken longer than planned however the current intention is to have a draft plan for the EFCC's Wanstead Park Working Group to discuss in September 2017. A Gateway 1 report will be submitted to the Project Sub Committee to inform them that we are working on project proposals that could lead to a significant project. A funding plan will be developed alongside the Parkland Plan and will form part of the discussion papers proposed for the Wanstead Park Working Group.

20. Risk Management Activity: Ongoing maintenance of highways edge vegetation will largely be contracted out through a three-year agreement with a local provider. In-house teams will focus on the more tricky locations where there are a number of constraints such as frequent parked cars and on maintaining sightlines at path and road junctions.

20.1 Trees identified for hazard removal will be a significant proportion of spring and summer programmes for the Arborist Teams. The tree safety zone map was reviewed in 2016 and in the process of doing this a number of opportunities for reducing our liabilities were identified. For example, all roads are surveyed every year but this does not distinguish between roads with fast or slow moving traffic. Working within the parameters of the tree safety policy it may be appropriate to survey some roads on a two-yearly basis rather than an annual basis which will reduce our survey costs. This review will be complete in time for the 2017-18 tree safety survey.

20.2 A potentially difficult tree safety operation held over from 2016 will be the reworking of the poplar and plane avenue at Woodford, leading to the Winston Churchill statue. An increasing number of trees are being identified for tree safety works and the avenue is getting to a point when its replacement should be considered. It is proposed that the City Corporation consults on the suggested felling of every second tree and planting the gap created with an appropriate new tree, for example English Oak (*Quercus robur*). The remaining avenue poplars will be retained until such time as the new planted oaks are sufficiently established and flourishing, circa 5-10 years' time. At this point the City Corporation would look to fell and replace

the remaining avenue poplars with English Oak. A more detailed proposal for managing this prominent avenue will be discussed at an EFCC Local meeting before being progressed with the London Borough of Redbridge members and officers at one of the regular liaison meetings which we host.

20.3 Car park: A review of our car parks is to be implemented in 2017. This will identify a strategy for their management and result in a detailed routine maintenance and improvement plan for these. As with the path review it is likely this work will result in a number of substantive issues which will be brought to the EFCC on completion for further discussion and consideration. Specific car park works proposed for 2017 will look to improve the security of car parks to reduce anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

21. Open Spaces Department Business Plan - The proposals follow from three of the Open Spaces Department's Strategic aims of: providing high quality accessible open spaces, involving communities in site management and adopting sustainable working practices.

22. Epping Forest Management Plan - The proposals match a number of the Epping Forest Vision for the 21st Century's key visions including:

- 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 protected.
- Epping Forest will be highly valued as part of a larger and fully accessible protected landscape area.

Implications

22. Financial - The work outlined in the proposed work programme is to be covered by the local risk budget of Epping Forest Division supplemented by grant aid from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and the Environmental Stewardship Scheme grant awarded by Natural England covering both Entry Level (ELS) and Higher Level (HLS) work. Grant income from these schemes in 2017 - 2018 will be over £260,000 (uncertainty regarding the new BPS scheme rates and the Euro-Pound exchange rate mean an exact figure is not possible at this stage). This total includes a Stewardship grant element for Forest habitats of over £160,000.

23. Legal - The habitats work programme is carried out in accordance with the Conservators' powers and duties under the Epping Forest Act 1878. Formal consent for these works has been sought from Natural England under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) for the SSSI and as required under the Habitats Regulations 2010 in relation to the SAC. The Stewardship-related works form part of an agreement with Natural England for grant payments in support of the restoration of habitats within the SSSI towards Favourable Condition status.

Conclusion

24. The work outlined above is drawn from the 2004-10 Epping Forest Management Plan, associated documents developed from that Plan and SSSI Favourable Condition priorities agreed with Natural England. Most of the work is a continuation of projects started in previous years.
25. The habitat work concentrates on ensuring the achievement of favourable condition of our wood-pasture, grasslands and heaths and that we meet our 10-year commitments under the HLS.
26. Volunteers will be instrumental in delivering a large proportion of the work on a number of key projects in 2017/18.
27. In-house teams will deliver much of the work detailed in the report. Contractors will be used to support implementation of the grass cutting and highway vegetation management works and a doubling of contractor involvement in woodpasture restoration work. is proposed.

Appendices

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Background Papers

The Epping Forest Management Plan 2004-2010;
The Barn Hoppit Wood-pasture Restoration Plan 2006-2011;
The Lords Bushes and Knighton Woods Integrated Site Plan 2004-2010;
The Wanstead Flats Integrated Site Plan 2006-2011;
Branching Out Stage II Project Plan (Nov 2008) – including the Keystone Trees and Grazing Strategies;
SEF 01/13 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: Grazing Expansion Plan for Implementing the Epping Forest Grazing Strategy. 13th Feb 2013.
Wanstead Park Conservation (2011);
SEF 50/16 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: Epping Forest Grazing Expansion Plan Continuity Arrangements. 21st November 2016
The Topology and Vegetational History of Some Epping Forest Sphagnum Bogs (Adams 2017).

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