

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons	15 01 2018
Subject: Cow Pond restoration by <i>Froglife</i> through bid to HLF (SEF 04/18)	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces & Heritage	For Decision
Report Author: Jeremy Dagley – Head of Conservation, Epping Forest	

Summary

The charity *Froglife* is proposing a bid the Heritage Lottery Fund for funds to enhance toad and other amphibian habitats around London. In addition to restoring habitats, *Froglife* aims to inform and involve local community and volunteer groups through its project. Working with your officers at Epping Forest, *Froglife* would like to put forward Cow Pond, Leyton Flats, as one of the seven ponds that it is looking to restore as part of its project.

Should the bid be successful this would see a £30,000 contract being awarded for the restoration of **Cow Pond**, involving its re-excavation and re-shaping within its current area. The funding would ensure that no costs would be incurred by the Epping Forest local risk budgets for achieving this restoration. This would represent a significant enhancement of the Forest ponds network in line with the existing Forest Management Plan vision. This would also help to enhance the favourable condition of the Site of Special Scientific Interest in the Leyton Flats area as well as maintaining an historic pond location.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- approve and support the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund by *Froglife* for funds for the restoration of Cow Pond, Leyton Flats for amphibians and other pond wildlife;
- Instruct City Solicitors to assist in drawing up or overseeing agreements with *Froglife* in relation to the proposed works and monitoring on Forest Land.

Background

1. *Froglife* is a national charity (Registered Charity no. 1093372) concerned with the conservation of the UK's reptiles and amphibians and their habitats. Through liaison with your officers the charity has already carried out habitat enhancement

work and education at the Wanstead Park exchange lands over the last few years.

2. *Froglife* is currently making a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a project to restore ponds around London and the south-east for toads, involving local communities and volunteers. The charity approached your officers earlier in 2017 about suitable toad ponds in the Forest that might benefit from habitat restoration work.
3. Epping Forest is an important site for amphibians, with 5 of the native species breeding here. The extensive populations across many ponds are recognised as “*an outstanding assemblage of amphibians*” under the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notification.
4. Despite the protection afforded by the Forest ponds, amphibians are under pressure here as in other UK sites. Many Epping Forest ponds are artificial and transitory in nature and risk being lost by natural succession to Carr (wet woodland) and eventual reclamation by the Forest. This is particularly pertinent at Cow Pond where previous Commoner’s grazing may have maintained the openness of the pond. Amphibians also face new threats including diseases, pollution, invasive non-native species of plants and animals and climate change-induced dry springs and summers fluctuating beyond normal variation.
5. Following an examination of our survey records and a series of site visits, Cow Pond near Leyton Flats was selected as a suitable site in need of enhancement for breeding toads. There have been toads observed using Hollow Ponds, although much of that habitat there is not ideal. Cow Pond should provide a better and less disturbed site for amphibians.
6. Cow Pond is an historic pond on the Forest which has held water across most summers in the last three decades, but which nonetheless has contracted in surface area due to silting up and natural vegetative succession. Successive dry summers have allowed Cow Pond to dry out for longer periods and this extensive but shallow site has been encroached by willows and reed sweet-grass (see **Appendix 1**). Re-excavating part of the pond would ensure continued open water habitat to which a sizeable toad population could be attracted.

Proposal

7. *Froglife* is making a bid to the HLF for the restoration of seven chosen ponds across London, of which **Cow Pond** is one. The bid is being submitted to HLF by the end of February 2018.
8. *Froglife*, in discussion with your Biodiversity Officer, has put forward a habitat action plan for Cow Pond (see **Appendix 1**). This involves re-excavation of the pond over an area of 3750m² within the footprint of the existing pond area, which is 6900m². Prior to the bid *Froglife* will also be taking soil profile samples from around Cow Pond to inform the exact shape of the excavation.

9. The re-excavation and re-profiling across this smaller surface area, with the excavated silt banded along the northern edge of the pond, should ensure open water is retained for longer and its new depth should prevent the incursion of sweet-grass or reed-mace.
10. The costs of the work is estimated to be £30,000 form part of *Froglife's* bid to HLF and the costs of the project would be borne by *Froglife* should its bid be successful. HLF requires a ten-year monitoring follow-up on the works and this will be carried out by *Froglife* and volunteers organised by *Froglife*, in liaison with your officers. As well as the excavation and habitat restoration, *Froglife* would use this project as an opportunity to involve local volunteers and to provide an exemplar site for educating and involving others in promoting amphibian conservation as well as the protection of the Forest's native fauna.

Options

11. **Option 1:** Supporting this proposed enhancement of Cow Pond would meet the objectives of the Epping Forest Management Plan: "*To maintain and enhance the network of ponds and bogs, steam, ditches and their banks for wildlife and amenity*". The full costs of the work and follow-up monitoring would be borne by *Froglife* and so the enhancement would be achieved without an impact on the Epping Forest local risk budget. **This option is recommended.**
12. **Option 2:** The Conservators could choose not to support this bid to HLF by *Froglife* and leave Cow Pond as it is. The pond would continue to dry out and become a marshy area with little or no open water and reduced habitat for amphibian breeding. **This option is not recommended.**

Corporate & Strategic Implications

13. The proposed letting accords with the Open Spaces Department Strategic Aims, by assisting the provision of a World Class City which protects, promotes and enhances our environment.

Implications

14. **Financial:** the funding for the works would come from the HLF and *Froglife* should the bid to HLF in 2018 be successful. Follow-up monitoring work over a ten-year period will be carried out by *Froglife* officers and its volunteers.
15. There is the minor risk that some further silt removal works will be needed during the ten-year period as well as management and cutting back of re-growing vegetation. The scale of this work during this period should fall well within the remit of volunteers, and would be similar to the scale of works undertaken periodically by volunteer groups at other ponds across the Forest.
16. As with other ponds in the Forest, there is a risk of alien plant species being introduced, but the site is not heavily visited and is not directly accessible from a

car park. Any such species would be dealt with as part of the wider alien species strategy that would be agreed as part of the future management planning.

17. **Legal** – should the HLF provide funding for the project it would be given to *Froglife*, which would manage all liabilities and contractual responsibilities in relation to the excavation works and the follow-up monitoring. *Froglife* would operate on Forest Land under a licence from the City and its contractor would be required to meet all Health and Safety standards, including the breaking ground protocol, required of contractors operating on the Forest.

Conclusions

18. This report recommends that support be given to *Froglife*'s bid for funds from the HLF for the restoration of Cow Pond at Leyton Flats. The proposed works, if enacted, would see the pond restored to an area of open water of 3750m² within the current footprint of the pond of 6900m². The re-excavated and deeper profile should allow open water to be retained and an important enhancement to amphibian habitats in the Forest to be achieved.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1:** Proposed habitat action plan for Cow Pond – *Froglife* (with input from Epping Forest Conservation team).

Background Papers

- Citation (March 1990) for Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Epping Forest Management Plan: A Summary (City of London 2007)

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