

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest Consultative Epping Forest and Commons	24 January 2018 12 March 2018
Subject: Epping Forest Buffer Lands – Annual Agricultural Holdings review (SEF 15/18)	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces and Heritage	For Information
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Summary

The City of London maintains 735 hectares of strategically-acquired Buffer Lands Estate under the approved Buffer Lands Policy. Collectively, the Buffer Lands Estate plays a key role in supporting the management objectives for the internationally-important Forest and protecting it from development and adverse land uses. In addition, they further provide enhanced public access, alternative sites for recreation, protection for ancient landscape areas and historic linkages to the Forest. The importance of these roles has been recognised in the current version of the Epping Forest District Council Local Plan, which includes an objective to ‘*conserve and enhance*’ the Forest and its Buffer Lands.

The Buffer Lands also provide essential operational underpinning of the approved Grazing Strategy, which is crucial to maintaining the *Favourable Condition* of the Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest. The grazing of the Buffer Lands is also required for maintenance of their important parkland landscapes and is proposed to continue with both in-house and licensee grazing.

Based on external land agency advice and existing agreements, Breach Barns Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) needs to be completed and notice may be served for a 2019-20 renewal of the FBT at Netherhouse. The agricultural rental income next year from agricultural tenancies will be slightly above the 2017-18 figures, following the renewal of the FBT at Copped Hall Park (North).

This report provides a summary of the main agricultural land management activities completed in 2017 – 18. It also previews proposed management and wildlife conservation operations, which will be in-line with national cross-compliance regulations.

The Forest’s conservation management objectives, as well as the Buffer Lands management, were directly supported by the Buffer Land Estate’s generation of a combined grant income expected to be over £165,000.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to approve:

- the procurement of land agency advice for the continuation and completion of negotiations at Breach Barns, for a review of Netherhouse, Obelisk Field and Woodredon Estate (south) agreements and on a case-by-case basis as required, adhering to City Procurement guidelines;
- the procurement of contract services for the carrying out of agricultural management, including fencing and weed control, as required, following City Procurement procedures;
- a renewal of the 3-yr lease to the Upshire Millennium Trust on similar terms;
- revision of the boundary between the Woodredon North Farm Tenancy business and No 2 Green Lane Bungalow to facilitate surplus property disposal.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London's Buffer Land is intended to help preserve the environmental setting, landscape quality (including historic grazing land linkages) and conservation of the Forest, as approved in the Buffer Lands Strategy & Policy by the Policy and Resources Committee on 14 October 1993.
2. Over the past 57 years the City has acquired 14 parcels of land, totalling 735 hectares (ha), on the perimeter of the Forest. This Buffer Land provides complementary wildlife habitats and recreational links between the Forest and the wider countryside and is of nature conservation importance. The area subject of this report is the 466ha, (63.4%) of the estate which is under agricultural management. The remaining 269.13ha of non-agricultural Buffer Land Estate comprises woodland, golf courses and the Deer Sanctuary. However, the grassland of the Sanctuary also attracts income under both the Basic Payment Scheme and the Forest's Environmental Stewardship agreement with Natural England (NE).
3. As well as being supported by the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) agri-environment support, the Buffer Land Estate forms a significant component of the Entry Level and Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Schemes (ELS/HLS) by generating "points" for habitat options that allows income-generating habitat options to be located on the Forest (see also *Financial Implications* below). As a result of this the Buffer Land provides direct financial support to the conservation management of Forest Land.
4. Much of this Buffer Land is also important to the Forest for operational reasons. In particular, the Buffer Lands provide essential support for the grazing of the Forest's wood-pasture by providing key grazing, haylage, lay-back lands and out-wintering areas for the Forest cattle

Current Position and 2017-18 report

5. The recommendations approved by Committee last year were all carried out and are included in the paragraphs 6 – 20 below.
6. The importance of the Buffer Lands' role in protecting the Forest's landscape setting, environment and biodiversity has been recognised in the current Regulation 19 submission version of the Epping Forest District Council Local Plan (Dec 2017), which includes an objective to 'conserve and enhance' the Forest and its Buffer Lands.
7. The Buffer Lands, along with the Forest and The Commons (Inc. Burnham Beeches), are now all merged under a 'single business identifier' as required by the Rural Payments Agency and as approved by your Committee in 2016.
8. The BPS payments and the ELS & HLS points generated by the Buffer Lands provided a combined anticipated final income in 2017-18 for the Epping Forest Local Risk budgets of around £165,000 (see also *Financial Implications* below).
9. **Grazing at Warlies Park and Copped Hall:** The Buffer Lands play a vital role in ensuring the continuation of traditional grazing of the Forest wood-pasture habitat. The grazing on the Buffer Lands also provides the appropriate management of the parkland at Warlies and the Grade II* landscape at Copped Hall Park. During 2017, the in-house grazing herd of English Longhorns grazed Warlies Park throughout the grazing season. At Copped Hall the fields were grazed by a licensee under an annual grazing licence.
10. The cattle from both the in-house and licensee's herds came off the Buffer Lands by November 2017. The move to winter housing completes a successful year of 16,000 grazing days. This exceeds previous grazing activity across all sites and follows the move to in-house management in November 2016.
11. All the cattle are now housed at Great Gregories. Autumn calving started with 14 calves being born by early December. As at the time of writing this report a further 16 calves are expected in January and February. All future calving is to be winter-calving timed between October and February.
12. The Commons' Sussex cows, 24 of them, arrived at Great Gregories at the end of November and the remainder of The Commons' young stock are due to arrive at the time of writing this report.
13. Great Gregories (5.58ha)
The permissive access across the Parliamentary Railway Field was removed as approved by Committee in the last report, to ensure improved security for the young livestock including new calves. The public footpath network here remains well-used and a further section of one of the hedgerows alongside the central footpath was laid to ensure it did not overgrow the pathway and to provide an attractive boundary. The work, led by volunteers, received interest and compliments from footpath users.
14. Additional works at Great Gregories have been taking place to improve the efficiency of the site and management of the cattle. This includes the laying of a

new concrete feed passage by the in-house Operations Team. The levelling off and laying hard-core surfaces was carried out by contractor alongside the new housing to provide easier access for machinery to feed the animals.

15. The CCTV camera system was also upgraded within existing budgets so that all cattle can be now viewed remotely day or night if required. By the end of March a new cattle handling system will be installed in the existing top cow shed and this will ensure safer handling conditions for both staff and the animals.
16. **Warlies Park** (27.4ha): 1,000metres of new fencing was erected to replace old fencing, beginning the replacement of the boundary fencing around this site which will continue over the next few years.
17. **Raveners**: the four fields at Raveners Farm were rented out under an annual herbage agreement to a local farmer and used for haylage.
18. Haylage was also taken from **Gt Gregories and North Farm** fields for over-winter feed for the in-house Longhorn herd.
19. **Copped Hall (North)** (70.32ha): The Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) was renegotiated at this site encompassing the same fields as in the previous FBTs and with the same tenant. A 4-yr FBT running until 20th September 2021 is now in place there.
20. The negotiations over the FBT at **Breach Barns** were started and are continuing with the tenant (see below).
21. At **Swaines Green** the boundary with a neighbouring property which had previously only been marked out using GPS and concrete marker posts was fenced, following agreement with the private land owner, ensuring secured boundaries for City Land and clear demarcation of public access across the land.

Proposals

22. It is proposed to offer the same annual herbage agreements to local farmers for the grazing of the **Copped Hall** Park and neighbouring fields and the taking of haylage at **Raveners**.
23. The tenancies at **Netherhouse, Woodredon Estate (south) and Obelisk Field, Warlies** will be reviewed with an external land agent to consider whether any changes need to be made through negotiations with the tenants.
24. The negotiations on the **Breach Barns** FBT will be concluded by the external land agent (Strutt & Parker), already engaged this year.
25. Following your Committee decision of November 2017 to declare No 2 Green Lane Bungalow surplus to requirements as an operational property, it will be necessary to renegotiate the boundary between the property and the Woodredon South Farm Tenancy held by Mr Nigel Padfield, whose current arrangements overlap.
26. The City Corporation has also been asked to consider compensation claims for crop loss following winter grazing of Fallow and Reeve Muntjac Deer on winter cereals. The services of an agronomist have been sought and a specific report will be made on the matter to your Committee.

27. At **Warlies Park** the current 3-yr lease on the Millennium Green field to Upshire Millennium Green Trust is coming to an end this year and it is proposed to renew it on similar terms for the continuing benefit of the local community and in recognition of the grant investment on a surfaced path that Committee approved in 2017.

28. The main body of **Warlies Park** would continue to be grazed by the in-house English Longhorn herd, as would the smaller fields at **Gt Gregories**. The remaining **Gt Gregories** fields and the fields at **North Farm** and **Woodredon North** (see below) would be taken for haylage as in previous years to ensure a good winter supply of fodder.

29. The **Trees Outside Woods Project** expression of interest, if accepted by the Woodland Trust, may be developed as part of a project for submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the areas of Buffer Lands that may be considered as part of any bid would be subject to approval through a separate reporting process to your Committee over the next 18 months.

- i. The following works on the Buffer Lands are scheduled for 2018 -19:
Replacement of fencing at various sites would continue with both contractors and in-house staff carrying out the work, including replacement and/or repairs to lengths of **Warlies Park** and **Copped Hall Deer Park** fencing
- ii. The 4 fields at **Woodredon North**, which are now managed in-house, would be cut early for a first crop of haylage and then over seeded to improve the quality of winter forage in the future to ensure that the English Longhorn herd can be 'finished' for market on grass rather than supplements.
- iii. Weed control may need to be carried out as in previous years, by a variety of methods including topping as well as some herbicide treatment, which for Ragwort would follow the Epping Forest Ragwort Protocol;
- iv. Fertilising a number of fields with farmyard manure from **Great Gregories** out-wintering housing will be carried out again, ensuring the Nitrogen Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) regulations are adhered to at all times, with detailed field-by-field records maintained by your officers;
- v. There would be continued management of the wildlife plots at **Copped Hall North** (alongside the tenanted arable land) for the benefit of biodiversity and this would be informed by the review of the bird populations following detailed breeding bird surveys completed last year by a volunteer;

30. Further tasks at **Swaines Green** would be carried out by the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers to undertake scrub management.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

31. The work and proposals outlined above meet the City of London Corporate Plan's (2015 -2019) key policy priorities of:

- maximising the opportunities and benefits afforded by our role in supporting London's communities;
- increasing the outreach and impact of the City's cultural, heritage and leisure contribution to the life of London and the nation.

32. **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.

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

- i. Epping Forest's position as a unique and ancient landscape for people and wildlife will be strengthened;
- ii. The Forest will retain its natural aspect with the diversity of wildlife habitats enhanced and the features of international importance protected.
- iii. Epping Forest will be highly valued as part of a larger and fully accessible protected landscape area.

Implications

34. **Financial** - under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, administered by Natural England, the Buffer Land generates points that are anticipated to have contributed around 59% of the Stewardship grant for 2017-18. This income helps to support conservation work including work towards *Favourable Condition* of the Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and *Favourable Conservation Status* of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC), as well as the good management of the Buffer Lands themselves.

35. The combined income generated by the Buffer Lands under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ES) is anticipated to be around £165,000 for 2017-18. These incomes, as well as the land itself, help underpin the approved Forest Grazing Strategy and The Conservators' habitat conservation work across both the Forest and Buffer Lands.

36. **Legal** – following the merger under a single business identifier there have been no further legal issues raised during the FY 2017-18.

37. **Property**: The use of a specialist agricultural letting and management consultant is desirable to ensure that the City Corporation receives the best advice to properly manage and maximise the benefit of the agricultural lettings.

Conclusions

38. More cow grazing days were completed than ever before across the Buffer Lands in 2017 due to a combination of in-house and licensed herds. This ensured the appropriate management of the important parkland landscapes. New fencing was completed at Warlies to begin a phased replacement of key boundary fencing that will allow the grazing of the parklands to continue. The renewal of the FBT at Copped Hall ensured continuity of management, while three other tenancies may be reviewed over the next two years with the tenants. The lease on Upshire Millennium Field also requires negotiation with a view to renewal on the same terms for the benefit of the local community.

39. The importance of the Buffer Lands to the Forest was reflected in the Epping Forest Local Plan. The developments proposed in this Plan will need to be considered carefully for their potential impacts on the management and

conservation of the Buffer Lands as well as the Forest itself and these considerations will be a key part of the work related to Buffer Lands over the forthcoming year.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1:** Epping Forest Buffer Lands Map

Background Papers

- Epping Forest Buffer Lands Action Plan 1998 (approved 13th July 1998)

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