

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest Management Plan Steering Group: For Decision	20 09 2019
Epping Forest Consultative: For Consultation	23 10 2019
Epping Forest and Commons: For Decision	18 11 2019
<b>Subject:</b> 'London's Great Forest' – A Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest 2019-29 (SEF 37/19b)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Open Spaces	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report authors:</b> Epping Forest Management Team	

### Summary

A new Management Strategy is needed to guide the future supervision of Epping Forest and its associated Arbitration and Buffer Land.

To prepare for a new Management Strategy, the City Corporation has commissioned a series of key studies to better inform the new Strategy. In addition to a Charity Review undertaken in 2009, the first five-year Epping Forest Visitor Survey was conducted between 2010 and 2015. In addition, a Statement of Community Involvement for the Management Strategy consultation was adopted by your Committee in March 2012. Following the completion of the Visitor Survey, a large public and stakeholder consultation exercise -'Epping Forest – The Next 10 Years'- was undertaken between June and October 2015, to seek the views of Epping Forest stakeholders and members of the public on numerous management issues. Your Committee approved the publication of the Consultation report in May 2016.

This report presents to the Steering Group a Strategy document which reflects the results of the Management Plan Steering Group's consideration of these key evidence documents and reflects the Group's desire for a revised management document that presents a short and succinct summary strategy which outlines the key management objectives for the Forest over the next 10 years.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the comments from the Consultative Committee comments on the Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest 2019-29
- Approve the content of the Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest 2019-29

## Main Report

### Background

1. The City Corporation has successfully managed Epping Forest as a public and conservation resource for the past 140 years. The proximity of the Forest to growing and vibrant London presents a myriad of opportunities and challenges. In order to maintain the Forest's multi-functional role in a much changed 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a robust, innovative and far-sighted Management Strategy is required to guide the sustainable management, maintenance, improvement and funding of the future Forest.
2. Following the expiry of the previous 2004-2010 plan, a replacement Management Plan was clearly required for Epping Forest. In order to engage with visitors, residents and stakeholders, the Forest has extended operation of the 2004-2010 Plan and consciously taken the necessary time to invest in a series of key evidence documents. The City Corporation has also sought to engage with stakeholders and the public during the early stages of developing plan process to help guide priority areas for action in the new plan.
3. These documents have included a range of initiatives that have sought to focus on the duties of the Conservators as outlined in the Epping Forest Acts 1878 & 1880 (as amended) and newer legislative responsibilities around nature and heritage conservation; charity requirements and public liability and safety responsibilities:
  - 3.1 A **Charity Review** conducted in 2009, which recommended changes to the Epping Forest Charity's image; the formal registration of Epping Forest land with Land Registry and the better protection of the Buffer Land.
  - 3.2 The first **Statement of Community Involvement** for the Management Plan consultation was adopted by your Committee on 5 March 2012, cataloguing some 84 community groups with a direct interest in the Forest.
  - 3.3 A five-year **Epping Forest Visitor Survey** was conducted between 2010 and 2015, which corrected previous visitor estimates of 700,000 annual visits with a revised figure of 4.2 million annual visits. The surveys also provided an evidence-based assessment of the pattern of visiting indicating that many southern locations in the Forest received the most visits.
  - 3.4 Additional Visitor Survey work has also been undertaken in 2018 and 2019 in relation to the protection of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
  - 3.5 A large online **public and stakeholder consultation exercise** 'Epping Forest – The Next 10 Years' was undertaken between June and October 2015, to seek the views of Epping Forest stakeholders and members of the public on numerous management issues.
  - 3.6 Work to develop 15 **Conservation Management Statements or Plans** for recognised heritage assets and landscapes within the Forest, that previously had not been fully understood. This work included major studies of the Forest's two Grade II\* Registered Parks and Gardens.

## Current Position

4. The draft Strategy document reflects the results of the Management Plan Steering Group's consideration of the two previous Management Plans, and the new key evidence documents. Officers have also sought to recognise the Group's desire for a more accessible document than the previous 245-page Plan. The draft Management Strategy therefore presents a short and succinct summary strategy focused on a small number of headline ambitions which outline the key management objectives for the Forest over the next 10 years.
5. The draft Strategy reflects the concerns of your working Group that the Forest needs to adopt a more policy-driven rather than ad hoc decision-making approach. The early years of the new draft Strategy commits the charity to developing a series of key strategic subject-specific documents that will provide greater clarity around the charity's management objectives and policy approaches.

## Options

6. Your Working Group has three options;
  1. Option 1: Approve the content of the draft strategy This option is **recommended**.
  2. Option 2: Approve the content of the draft strategy with recommendations for amendment. This option is **not recommended**.
  3. Option 3: Do not approve the draft Strategy and seek substantial re-drafting. This option would further delay the development of a new Management Strategy for the Forest Fund is therefore **not recommended**.

## Proposals

7. With the Working Group's approval, this draft Strategy will be considered by the Epping Forest Consultative Committee prior to further consideration by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee. If approved, the draft Strategy would then be subject to public consultation, prior to amendment and adoption by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

8. The recommendations of this report support the Corporate Plan with particular reference to the following aims:
  - a. Contribute to a flourishing society**
    - i. People enjoy good health and wellbeing
    - ii. Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need.
  - b. Shape Outstanding Environments**
    - i. We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration
    - ii. We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment

iii. Our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained.

9. And supports the Open Spaces Business Plan as follows:

**a. Open Spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible.**

- i. Our open spaces, heritage and cultural assets are protected, conserved and enhanced
- ii. London has clean air and mitigates flood risk and climate change

## Implications

10. **Financial:** The Strategy includes details of how the City Corporation funds the management of the Forest, together with information on the spending priorities for management.
11. **Legal:** Section 3 of the Epping Forest Acts 1878 & 1880 states that '*Epping Forest shall be regulated and managed under and in accordance with the Act by the City of London Corporation ... as the Conservators of Epping Forest*'. The Act includes responsibilities in relation to deer; rights of common; inclosure; maintenance in perpetuity; the preservation of the natural aspect; the preservation of the Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge; the right of the public to use Epping Forest as an Open Space for recreation and enjoyment, together with the observance of the enduring requirements of the arbitrators awards. These obligations need to be balanced alongside the requirements of subsequent modern legislation.
12. **Equalities & diversity:** An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of this Strategy has been undertaken. At this stage, it is considered that there are no negative impacts on the protected equality groups.
13. **Charity:** Open Spaces Charity. Epping Forest is a registered charity (number 232990). Charity Law obliges Members to ensure that the decisions they take in relation to the Charity must be considered to be in the best interests of the Charity.
14. **Exiting the European Union (EEU):** The main influence of EU law on strategy development relates to the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the 'SEA Regulations') and the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna & Flora, which is incorporated into UK law as the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the 'Habitats Regulations'). The future influence of existing EU Directives and the Regulations may be affected by exiting the EU and will also be consequent on the terms reached with the EU as part of Brexit negotiations and the future governments views on 'Retained EU law' contained within the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018.
15. **Consultative Committee:** A number of Members congratulated Officers on the creation of a authoritative and strategic strategy for the Forest, but questioned the timescales of some of the proposed sub-plans and encouraged the Corporation to take a longer term view beyond 2028. Members also emphasised the importance of strongly linking with the Local Plans for the four Local Planning Authorities that cover the Forest. Some Members raised concerns regarding the

ability of the City Corporation to realise the Strategy given the current budget constraints, with Officers indicating that better aligned work programmes should optimise the use of resources. Some Members also asked for a higher profile for heath and acid grassland in the Strategy, requested a greater emphasis on delivery partnerships and challenged the title description of Epping Forest as London's Great Forest.

## **Conclusion**

16. The development of the draft Epping Forest Management Strategy represents a major step forward in the progressive management of the Forest. Your Working Group's approval of the broad principles for future management will enable the City Corporation to respond to the issues raised through the visitor surveys, and during public consultation, while seeking to engage with the opportunities and challenges that the Forest will face over the next 10 years.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – 'London's Great Forest' – A Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest 2019-29
- Appendix 2 - Glossary

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