

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons	10 03 2020
Subject:	Public
London Borough of Culture 2019 Summary (SEF 08/20)	
Report of:	For
Director of Open Spaces	Information
Report Author:	
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Summary

The first ever London Borough of Culture was awarded to London Borough of Waltham Forest for 2019. The City of London Corporation has been a major partner for the initiative, committing support and resources in kind.

Over a dozen events took place on City of London land at Epping Forest and were supported by staff from the Epping Forest Division and with usual hire fees and officer time totalling £68,250 being waived to support the programme.

This report updates your committee on the in-kind support to the London Borough of Culture in its inaugural year and summarises the value to Epping Forest.

Recommendation

Committee Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan invited applications from London Boroughs to become the first-ever London Borough of Culture. The successful bid was made by Waltham Forest who presented a year of cultural activity in 2019.
2. Deputy Catherine McGuinness, Policy Chair, wrote to Sadiq Khan to offer a partnership with the City of London Corporation to the Year of Culture confirming an in-principle commitment to put assets and services to best use in support of the programme and that officers would work to deliver the best and most beneficial outcome to achieve the London Borough of Culture's objectives.
3. City of London Epping Forest supported the London Borough of Culture, as a member of the London Borough of Culture, Culture Board, working with the creative director and producers to curate and host over 16 events within the Forest.

Current Position

4. Events were held in varying locations within the Forest but all were within the London Borough of Waltham Forest boundaries. Epping Forest staff time and venue hire was given freely to support the programme and in addition to the main events listed here, pop-up dance activities, walks and talks were held or culminated in the Forest.

Africa Express

5. 'Africa Express' was a music concert held inside a big top marquee, placed at Bushwood north on 29 March, hosting a wide range of world music from local and international groups and headlined by Blur to a capacity audience of 3,000.
6. The event ran smoothly and without complaint. The site was vacated within 7 days and all earth bunding reinstated to the required standard. The event was licenced by the LBWF and went through the full Safety Advisory Group scrutiny process. A detailed emergency plan and all relevant certificates were supplied to Epping Forest in advance of the event.

May Day Fayre

7. The May Day Fayre was held on Chingford Plain on 6 May. Unseasonably cold weather let this event down but over 3,000 attended and a safely planned fire sculpture and fireworks were lit at the finale of the day. Our Head of Conservation was heavily involved in the planning stages to ensure there was no adverse impact on the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) area.

Giants Opera

8. Giant took place at Barn Hoppitt on 19 and 20 October and was another of the flagship events. An extraordinary theatrical experience created by Arts and Gardens it featured a children's choir singing from the trees along with professional opera performance with creative lighting and costumes telling the story of the giants through new music and poetry.
9. Our in-house ecologist advised on location to avoid disturbance to wildlife and full tree surveys were undertaken. Arborists prepared the trees before nesting season and were heavily involved in the 8-month planning process. Seven days of rehearsals were accommodated in the QEHL and the Visitor Centre as well as two public climbing days and two performance nights

The People's Forest

10. The People's Forest was a year-long programme of smaller artistic works on the theme of exploring human relationships with the Forest and the myriad of meanings placed on woodland.
11. Commencing with a book launch of producer Luke Turner's *Out of the Woods* on 24 Jan, the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge and Visitor Centre continued to be the venue for a series of events under the People's Forest programme:
 - An INSET training event for teachers was hosted in Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge on 21 March to promote the City of London Corporation

education programme and provide materials to teach the history of the Forest in the lead up to the May Day Fayre

- **Women in the Woods** took place on 23 May and was a women-only walk in the Forest led by artist and poet Clare Archibald followed by a panel discussion exploring the history and ecology of the Forest and relationships with walking alone
- On 20/21 June **The Dark Outside** was a live 24-hour radio broadcast from deep within the Forest.
- In July **Living Symphonies** took place over 5 days within the Forest near to Chingford Plain. Visitors were overwhelmingly positive about the experience where they heard the musical composition emerging from the undergrowth as they moved between speakers. Each species of resident wildlife was represented by different musical elements, which were combined in real-time by a computer model of the ecosystem to create the composition.
- **Monstrous Assemblies** was an exhibition by artist Esther Nelsen who worked with local schools throughout the year to create eight life size sculptures of 'monsters' which were installed at the Visitor Centre courtyard in Chingford for a week in November.
- Working as an artist-in-residence in Epping Forest, Ellie Wilson, is a composer/violinist, and member of 'Britain's most exciting new folk band' (Uncut Magazine) and 4-time BBC Radio 2 Folk Award nominees, Stick In The Wheel. Throughout the year she created a set of new compositions entitled **Echoes** inspired by human impact on the forest through the centuries. Throughout November and December these were available to listen to on headphones available at the Chingford Visitor Centre. The headphones were then available in January and February 2020 at the visitor centre in High Beach.
- Artist Una Hamilton-Helles created an immersive soundscape of the Forest, **Becoming the Forest**, reflecting on sentient plants, trees, ecology from root to the canopy and voices from the Forest. The launch on Halloween night (and installed until Sunday 3rd November) within the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge it also featured theatrical performance.

Ways of Seeing

12. The Government Art Collection worked with London Borough of Culture to turn the whole borough in to a gallery space. The 'front room' inside the View Visitor Centre hosted Sir Jacob Epstein's Epping Forest (1933) and Clare Woods' Grimm's Ditch (2007). The artwork was displayed from 24 April to 29 August and was accompanied by related talks and activities

Strategic Implications

13. **Resource Implications:** The City of London Corporation supported the programme of events on Forest land through in-kind support. Support was made from a range of staff including Head of Visitor Services, Head of Operations, Head of Conservation, Ecologist, visitor services staff, keepers, arborists and administrators. The hire fee for use of built venues for meetings and licence fee of Forest land was waived. A breakdown of this support is shown in Appendix A.

Total value of support 'in-kind' £68,250

Evaluation

14. Epping Forest benefitted from supporting the programme in a number of ways:
 - Gaining experience of hosting a large-scale concert on Forest land with minimal disruption, damage or adverse comment.
 - Trialling new spaces within the Forest for events with many successes
 - Introducing new audiences to the Forest
 - Opportunity to host new, more adventurous artistic programming without financial risk.
 - Opportunity to work closely with artists and producers who have enjoyed working in the Forest and wish to return with new projects in the future

15. A short film was produced to celebrate the events held in the Forest:
YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X63B7hcblkQ>

16. The most recent evaluation of the full programme by London Borough of Waltham Forest is here:
<https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/s69609/Appendix%20%20-%20Evaluation.pdf>

17. Within the evaluation they celebrate the legacy of expanding partnerships through the programme:

City of London Corporation: towards a more creative future for the Forest

As owners of Epping Forest, the City of London has been a key partner. This relationship has offered stunning settings for events, but it has also shaped how the Corporation views the Forest. Jacqueline Eggleston, Head of Visitor Services, told us that while the Forest has hosted events before, this year has seen “**more cultural and artistic events**” – all “**of a higher quality**”. This has pushed the City to **try new things**: “We tend to have events in the same locations, so **we tried out new locations, and they worked...** now we can be flexible with how the forest is used... staff I think will be **far more open to doing things in the future... that’s a great legacy**”.

Implications

18. **Financial:** The £68,250 cost of ‘in-kind’ financial support was met from Epping Forest Local Risk budget.

19. **Legal:** Under section 7 of the City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Act 2018, the Conservators may temporarily use or permit others to use Forest land for the purposes of an event; provide, or arrange for another person to provide, equipment, facilities or services for the event; so far as necessary restrict, or authorise others to restrict, access to an area of Forest land temporarily in connection with the event; and charge for such permission or provision, or charge or authorise others to charge for admission to the event.

20. The above powers must be exercised having regard to the approved Events Policy. The general duties of the Conservators to preserve Epping Forest as an unenclosed public open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public, and as far as possible to preserve its natural aspect also still apply, subject to the above provisions.

21. If events are to be permitted on the Forest, they should be governed by suitable licence terms to ensure that the City of London Corporation is suitably

indemnified and that consent to use represents best value according to the charitable operating requirements.

22. **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 taken in the best interests of the Charity.

Conclusion

23. A central element of the LBWF London Borough of Culture Bid was the influence of Open Spaces on the culture of the Borough. Epping Forest forms some 31% of LBWF's Open Space. Consequently, the LBoC programme featured a series of events which celebrated the role of Epping Forest in the life of the Borough.
24. Epping Forest benefitted from participation by developing new partnerships, with the London Borough of Waltham Forest and with artists and producers as well as introducing new audiences to the Forest and new high-quality art experiences in new places.

Appendix A – Summary of events and support 'in-kind'

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