

| Committee(s)   |                  | Dated:                              |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Epping Forest Consultative Committee                 | For consultation | 23 October 2020<br>16 November 2020 |
| Epping Forest and Commons Committee                  | For decision     |                                     |
| Subject:<br>Epping Forest Cycling Strategy SEF 25/20 |                  | Public                              |
| Report of: Director of Open Spaces                   |                  | For Decision                        |
| Report author: Laura Lawson                          |                  |                                     |

### Summary

A new cycling strategy for Epping Forest outlines the challenges currently presented by cycling in Epping Forest and proposes a range of actions to address these.

Specifically, actions include increasing engagement with the different cycling communities, creating a circular route with targeted promotion at cyclists, allowing greater permissive cycling in Wanstead Park and identifying temporary exclusion zones for cycling in the Forest to allow for habitat recovery.

### Recommendation

Consultative Committee Members are asked to:

- Consider the Epping Forest Cycling Strategy

### Main Report

#### Background

1. The Forest is a popular place to enjoy cycling in the natural environment and to explore further than visitors might be able to do on foot. In the Visitor Survey (2014) it was estimated that as many as 10% of visitors to Epping Forest do so to cycle. In context, that is over 400,000 visits per annum. The most recent 'snapshot' survey (2020) puts that figure at 18% of users.
2. Existing byelaws cite bicycles and tricycles in section 3(10) of the Epping Forest Byelaws & Additional Byelaws (1980/1986); *Driving, moving, or using a bicycle, tricycle or vehicle upon the Forest to the danger, injury, annoyance or inconvenience of the public' is prohibited.* The byelaw does not represent an outright ban on bicycles but instead outlines boundaries regarding forms of exhibited behaviour.
3. There are several areas of the Forest where cycling is not permitted, either by byelaw (Wanstead Park), to preserve designated sites or by previous decisions by your Committee, taken under a Various Powers Act restrict use up to 10% of the Forest.

4. Responsible cycling is welcomed in Epping Forest and a Code of Conduct (Appendix 1) outlines the behaviours expected and those which are not permitted, such as racing, of any form.
5. There have been numerous reports to your Committee, dating from the mid-1990s detailing specific cycling related issues. This is in part due to the ebb and flow of cycling popularity influenced by external drivers, such as the rise in popularity of both Multi-Terrain Bike (MTB) (1996) and BMX (2008), following their inclusion in the Olympic Games.

### **Current Position**

6. Since the Coronavirus pandemic, the Forest has seen a large increase in visitors. Recent snapshot visitor surveys put the increase of visitors at 350%.
7. These visitors enjoy many different pastimes and cycling, in its various disciplines, is proving increasingly popular, growing by 8% in recent months.
8. This growth may account for an increase in the incidents of user conflict between cyclists and other Forest users, such as dog walkers and horse riders, and some negative impact on some sensitive areas of the Forest.
9. To address this initially, the Cycling Code of Conduct has recently been revised and re-circulated via signage, social media and the City of London website. The Code promotes shared use and courteous behaviour which most visitors abide by.
10. Forest Keepers have found evidence of physical alterations (construction of jumps and berms) installed to increase the riding challenge. These are constructed by individuals or small groups, belonging to a sub-set of cyclists, known as mountain bike (MTB) or Bicycle Motocross (BMX) riders.
11. These constructions are not permitted, and the Operations Team have been removing them when found. This has caused a small amount of negative publicity, particularly on interest groups on social media, which dissipated quickly.
12. Officers recognise that more work is needed to fully understand and engage with cyclists using the Forest and the Epping Forest Cycling Strategy (Appendix 2) outlines the opportunities Epping Forest presents for recreational cyclists whilst providing additional measures to manage the balance between visitors and protection of the Forest.

### **Proposals**

13. The Epping Forest Cycling Strategy proposes additional measures be taken to help manage the impacts of cycling in Epping Forest; to better ensure the safety and enjoyment of all visitors and to mitigate damage, or potential damage, to the Forest environment which increased cycling may bring.
14. The strategy will be reviewed cyclically (initially 3 years) to ensure that the content is relevant and responsive to the demands of the current time.
15. Specifically, the strategy proposes several actions that will address the challenges presented by cycling in Epping Forest:

- a. Promoting responsible conduct and the 'shared use' nature of Forest paths and trails
- b. Creation of 'exclusion zones' where cycling will be prevented for a set period to allow for habitat restoration
- c. Additional clarity that there will be no allowance of man-made MTB or BMX structures
- d. Proactive engagement with cyclists capturing the various cycling variations, such as MTB, BMX or gravel riding
- e. Promotion of a circular cycling route
- f. Engagement with partners to enable where feasible, commuting within the Forest by bicycle
- g. A review of cycling in Wanstead Park with an aim to increase permissive use

## Options

- 16. Option 1 – Adopt the Epping Forest Cycling Strategy. Adopting the Strategy will assist officers in their duty to protect the Forest and improve the visitor experience. **This option is recommended.**
- 17. Option 2 – Do not adopt the Epping Forest Cycling Strategy. Dismissing the Strategy will not address the continued growth in the number of visitors choosing to cycle in Epping Forest and the consequential impact on the Forest and its other visitors. **This option is not recommended.**

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

### Strategic implications

- 18. The strategy supports the Corporate Plan (2018-23) outcomes – Contributes to a flourishing society (1 & 2) and Shape outstanding environments (11 & 12)
- 19. The strategy supports the Open Spaces Department Business Plan 2020/21 – outcomes 1, 3, 5, 7, 8 & 11.
- 20. Recreational cycling meets with the Epping Forest Strategy, 'London's Great Forest' (2020 – 2030) strategic objectives 1 & 3 - 'A welcoming destination for all' & 'An inspiring space for peoples' health, recreation and enjoyment'

### Financial implications

- 21. Initial actions proposed in the Strategy can be met within existing local risk budgets.

### Equalities implications

- 22. An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of this decision has been undertaken by the City Corporation. At this stage, it is considered that there are no negative impacts on the protected equality groups.

## Charity implications

23. 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

24. Epping Forest is an increasingly popular location for cycling. As the activity and nature of cycling grows, additional measures will be necessary to help to manage visitor enjoyment whilst protecting the Forest.

## Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Epping Forest Cycling Code of Conduct
- Appendix 2 – Epping Forest Cycling Strategy

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