



Epping  
Forest

Registered Charity

# Cycling Strategy

## 2020 - 2023

October 2020

City of London Corporation, Epping Forest

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# Introduction

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1. Cycling is a growing, popular, recreational pastime, and it has previously been estimated that around 10% of people who visit the Forest, do so to cycle. In context, that is over 400,000 visits per annum.
2. Since the Covid-19 pandemic there has been up to 350% increase in visits to the Forest and cyclists now represents up to 18% of visitors.
3. Recreational cycling meets with the Epping Forest Strategy, 'London's Great Forest' (2020 – 2030)<sup>i</sup> strategic objective 3 '*An inspiring space for peoples' health, recreation and enjoyment*' and the City of London Corporate Plan 2018-23 aim: *Contribute to a flourishing society - People enjoy good health and wellbeing.*

## What we have now

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### Paths and terrain

4. Paths in the Forest are mostly multi-user and none are designated or promoted specifically for cycling.
5. The terrain used for cycling varies in Epping Forest. There are 36km<sup>ii</sup> of surfaced shared-use paths which provide a firm 'gravel', surface that cyclists may use. These are not suitable for road bikes with tarmac specific tyres but suit most other bicycle types and all levels of cyclists, including young children, for enjoyable off-road leisure cycling.
6. There are also informal unsurfaced paths, totalling over 170km<sup>iii</sup>, through rough woodland and grassland. These can become very muddy and difficult to cycle, particularly in the winter but are still popular with multi-terrain bike (MTB) riders year-round.

### Signage and maps

7. Whilst there are many surfaced and unsurfaced paths in the Forest that cyclists use, they are not promoted for cyclists and there are no specific cycling routes. Signage aimed at cyclists is limited to areas where cycling is not permitted, such as at ecologically, historically and geologically sensitive sites.
8. There are nine waymarked routes which cover a combination of surfaced and unsurfaced paths. These are in the most part aimed at visitors on foot and routes may not be suitable for all types of bike/ability of rider. Similarly, the few other signposted routes are easy access trails where cycling is not permitted.

### Cycling for access or travel

9. Cycling as a transport method for Londoners is supported by the City of London Corporation. This healthy, sustainable travel solution benefits the Forest by reducing the impact of air and noise pollution in and around the Forest. To encourage visitors to travel to/from the Forest by bicycle, cycle parking has been installed in the car parks upgraded as part of the Branching Out Project; Jubilee Pond, Chingford Hub, High Beach Hub, Connaught Water and at The View, Epping Forest Visitor Centre.
10. There are cycle parking facilities at Jubilee Pond, Chingford Hub, High Beach Hub and Connaught Water. These sites are highly popular with visitors and the cycle parking

facilities make them accessible by bicycle for those who choose sustainable transport methods.

11. Since 2010, the City of London Corporation has worked with local authority partners and Transport for London (TfL) to facilitate a number of cycle routes;

<b>Date</b>	<b>Route name &amp; connections</b>	<b>Distance (km)</b>	<b>Delivery Partner</b>
2010	Quietway 6 (Barkingside to Wanstead Flats) &	6km	Redbridge & TfL
2011	Epping Forest Greenway (Snaresbrook to Stratford)	7km	Olympic Delivery Authority, TfL and LA's
2011	Centre Road Crossing Point (for the Redbridge Greenway)	N/A	Redbridge & TfL
2011	Wanstead Park Cycle Path	1.5km	Redbridge
2012	Roding Valley Way (Roding Valley Station to Beckton)	15km	Redbridge
2013	Wanstead Park Permissive Cycle Path	0.5km	Redbridge
2017	Quietway 6 (Aldersbrook Road to Aldgate)	5.5km	Newham & TfL

### **Cycle Hire**

12. In 2017, the Conservators supported Go Further Cycling to provide cycle hire in the Forest just a short walk from Chingford train station. Chingford station is serviced by a direct, overland train from London Liverpool Street Station which takes around 25 minutes.
13. Go Further Cycling houses a small retail area for bicycle parts/spares and carry out servicing and repairs.

### **Other Facilities**

14. Car Parks - There are numerous car parks, across the Forest, where adequate parking is provided for those wishing to travel to the Forest before starting their bicycle ride. This is often a choice for those engaging in more technical MTB due to the heavier bikes being unsuitable for road riding but also those with younger family members who are capable of cycling in a traffic free environment but cannot negotiate the busy access roads such as the A104, A121 or A1069.
15. Refreshments –Butler's Retreat and the Holly Tree Café provide indoor seated experiences for those seeking a social refreshment stop and the Forest Tea Huts, along with other local venues, give riders plenty of options to enjoy hot/cold drinks and snacks before, during or after their rides.

16. Toilets – Public toilets are available at the Visitor Centres at High Beach, Chingford and Wanstead Park and on Forest Land at Woodford Green (provided by London Borough of Redbridge).
17. Go Further Cycling and Epping Forest District Council both offer led cycle rides to encourage greater confidence cycling in the Forest for newer riders.

### Cycling Restrictions

18. Cycling is currently **not permitted** in the following areas;

- i) Wanstead Park - It is contrary to Wanstead Park Byelaws and Regulations (1903) & additional byelaws 1950 to cycle in the park.  
  
However, in line with the byelaws, there are two permissive access routes which have been set apart by the Conservators for the purpose of cycling, thus permitting access between the Aldersbrook Estate and Wanstead and vice versa, as indicated by signage to that effect exhibited in the Park.
- ii) The easy access paths found at High Beach, Connaught Water, Knighton Wood and Jubilee Pond – this is for the safety and comfort of visitors with access needs.
- iii) Loughton Camp and Amesbury Banks – cycling could cause damage to these two Iron Age earthworks, both Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM) which are of national importance.
- iv) Loughton Brook – listed as a Local Geological Site (LoGS) and the brook meanders have important geology that could be damaged by cycling.
- v) Buffer Lands – free range cycling is not permitted on this, **mainly farmed, land**. However, there are bridleways and byways which can be used in line with the Countryside Code.

19. Additional restrictions exist for certain types of bicycle

- i) De-restricted e-bikes or speed pedalecs are **not permitted**.<sup>iv</sup>

20. Other activities which are **not permitted** are;

- i) Racing of any kind - including digital KOM/QOM 'chasing'
- ii) Building jumps, berms, trails or any other physical alteration of the Forest's fabric intended for cycling use.<sup>v</sup>

21. The Conservators actively promote the **Epping Forest Cycling Code of Conduct** to ensure the safety, and comfort, of all our visitors and the protection of the Forest.<sup>vi</sup>

## Vision

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22. Epping Forest is 'a **welcoming green space for recreational cyclists of all ages to explore and enjoy responsibly which aides connected local routes for active travel**'.

## Objectives

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23. To promote responsible cycling to ensure that those who choose to explore the Forest by bicycle can do so with ease and enjoyment without negatively impacting on the Forest or other visitors.
24. To enable provision for those in the local community choosing active travel to get to and from school, work or local facilities.
25. To improve engagement with the cycling community to educate and gain knowledge of the challenges and issues when cycling in Epping Forest.

## Challenges

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26. There are a number of significant challenges that are faced managing cycling in Epping Forest;
  - a) **User conflict** - Cyclists can be perceived as intimidating to other visitors using shared use paths, particularly if they pass without warning or at speed. However, complaints about cyclists are occasional so it appears that most cyclists ride considerately and yield to walkers and horse riders as required by the Epping Forest Cycling Code of Conduct and the Countryside Code. Complaints have increased during the Covid-19 pandemic which may indicate the number of riders new to cycling and/or to the Forest.
  - b) **Damage** – Some areas attractive to more adventurous cyclists have been damaged through repeated and intensive use. The more sensitive ground areas in the Forest are affected by compaction, erosion or plant destruction and some riders have also added man-made jump/ramp structures, damaging the ecology. At the time of publication, this is particularly apparent at the Claypit Hill area. The protection of the Forest takes priority over this type of activity which therefore cannot be permitted.<sup>vii</sup>
  - c) **Carrying capacity** – During the Covid-19 pandemic, visitor numbers increased by around 350%, with survey data showing many more cyclists in certain areas. There is also an increased demand for housing in the area<sup>viii</sup>. Local Plans for the London Boroughs neighbouring the Forest (Waltham Forest, Redbridge and Newham) project some 78,000 new homes and there are also proposals for over 11,400 homes in Epping Forest District Council by 2035. That is nearly 90,000 new neighbours for the Forest. It is certain that this will result in a lasting increase in the number of visitors, including those who cycle. This increase in visitor numbers will require management to ensure the Forest can cope with demand as highlighted during the pandemic.
  - d) **Engagement** - Other recreational activity groups, such as runners or horse riders are represented on the Epping Forest Consultative Committee (EFCC). Cyclists are not directly represented although there are currently several members of EFCC who are keen cyclists and do represent these visitors in a secondary capacity. The Conservators have not yet found an effective method to engage with the cycling community. We believe that this is in part due to the individual nature of the activity but also that those who cycle in Epping Forest tend to be content with the provision and therefore do not feel the need to engage currently.

- e) **Route Finding** - Cyclists tend to navigate the Forest through word of mouth and recommendation. The Epping Forest map in downloadable format is not sufficiently detailed for navigation around the Forest. A more detailed, Collins, map of Epping Forest is available to purchase but in the main cyclists are using electronically available apps such as Strava or GPS. This does mean that in some cases routes are being actively promoted which may or may not, be suitable for cycling
- f) **Commuting** - The Forest does not offer many routes suitable for commuting by road bicycle and cyclists in the main use their local tarmac roads in preference to off road in the Forest. The Forest suffers from the effects of pollution due to high traffic levels and has a role to play in enabling a modal shift away from car use. However, a significant increase in commuters travelling off-road by bike, through the Forest, could exacerbate current, or raise new, issues.
- g) **Wanstead Park** – The regulation of cycling in Wanstead Park is incongruous with the rest of Epping Forest as a large section of it is governed by a separate set of bylaws. There is a permitted cycle route through from Northumberland Avenue linking with Warren Road but cycling is otherwise not permitted within the Park. This is a confusing message with cyclists often cycling on routes other than the permitted route along with other members of the public under the impression that cycling is not permitted at all, creating conflict.

## Actions

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27. In order to address these challenges, the Conservators will aim to:

- a) **Reduce user conflict** – most visitors are respectful of each other and courteous of each other but there can be incidences where visitor behaviour is perceived as disrespectful, offensive or to cause a nuisance.
  - i) **Targeted pro-active management of visitors** – As part of our Communications Strategy, we will look at how we can better target messages to Forest visitors, promoting the 'shared-use' status of all paths.
  - ii) A **Code of Conduct for Cyclists** has been produced and posted throughout the Forest outlines the need for cyclists to give way to walkers, horses and their riders.
- b) **Reduce Damage** – Immediate remedial action is required to counteract the overuse and erosion caused to certain sensitive areas. We propose the creation of additional zones where cycling is excluded to allow recovery of the sensitive ground and tree root compaction. An initial exclusion period of 3 years is proposed for these zones while recovery is monitored. These will be reviewed and reopened at the end of the three years or the exclusion extended for a further period depending on recovery.
  - i) **Exclusion Zones** – Zones for a time limited exclusion of cycling will be identified from the following list of areas currently identified as suffering damage from cycling activity and will be prioritised in order of urgency. No more than 5 of these locations or a maximum of 100 acres will be excluded per three-year period.

Zones	Reason for exclusion
Claypit Hill, Pillow Mounds	Concentrated use causing severe erosion/damage
Long Running, Sunshine Plain, Furze Ground (heathland habitats)	detrimental to the ground flora structure and heathland flora, disturbance of reptiles
Court Hill (Compartment 11) & Deershelter Plain (Compartment 12)	Beech Special area of conservation (SAC) rare moss damage
Big View, Woodbury Hollow, Trueloves and Fernhills	Those with sensitive ground flora, ground nesting species and geologically important sites

- c) **MTB** - Forest protection, specifically the duty to 'preserve the natural aspect', is prioritised against installing man-made features for more challenging off-road riding. It is therefore not proposed to relax the restriction on building jumps and other features in the Forest or to set aside areas to allow this activity. There are two man-made cycle specific sites in the region which offer trails to satisfy those who require more specific, MTB, off-road riding. Redbridge Cycle Centre offers a 2.5km long blue trail and the Lee Valley Velopark offers 8km of trails with varying levels of difficulty, from blue to black. Both sites are less than 10 miles from Epping Forest.
- d) **Carrying capacity** – This will be addressed through a Sustainable Visitor Strategy which will target measures such as improved signage and facilities to encourage visitor use of more sustainable areas of the Forest. This, along with a reviewed programme of exclusion areas will centre cycling activity in areas and on paths that can sustain the activity but that remain equally attractive to users.
- e) **Engagement** – Proactive engagement with formal and informal cycling groups as well as individual cyclists will take place with a view to encouraging cycling representation on to the Epping Forest Consultative Committee at its next membership review.
- f) **Route Finding** – we will promote a dedicated circular cycle route within the Forest, connecting to cycle paths beyond the Forest. This will help to encourage cyclists away from informally promoted routes by third parties on to tracks that are properly managed for recreational cycling.
- g) **Commuting** - Whilst there is no intention of providing tarmac routes and lighting in the Forest which would be contrary to the protection of the natural aspect and designated conservation site, we will work positively with partners to enable where possible, better strategic links across Forest land to wider cycle networks to encourage greener transport options.
- h) **Wanstead Park** - We will undertake a review of the current restrictions in the Park with an aim to allow permissive cycling throughout Wanstead Park on surfaced paths. Park users will be consulted as part of the process to ensure local feedback on any proposals.

## Implementation

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The action plan below shows year 1 & 2 actions that are within budget. Longer term actions, such as path improvements, dedicated cycle ways and other infrastructure will be outside of normal budget parameters and will need additional resource through fundraising and income generation.

Action	Deadline	Responsible Officer
Promotion of Cycling Code of Conduct	Dec 2020	Head of Visitor Services
Detailed defining of Exclusion Zones prioritised by degrees of damage.	Dec 2020	Head of Conservation
Communication of these through signage and physical indicators (e.g. posts)	March 2021	Head of Visitor Services Head of Operations
Engagement with cycling users and groups	June 2021	Head of Visitor Services
Work with partners to increase cycle hire and cycling infrastructure	2021	Head of Visitor Services
Review of permissive cycling in Wanstead Park	July 2021	Head of Conservation
Preparation and promotion of a circular route for cycling	July 2021	Head of Visitor Services Head of Operations

## List of appendices

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### 28. Appendix 1 - Cycling Code of Conduct

## References

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- <sup>i</sup> Epping Forest Strategy, 'London's Great Forest' (2020 – 2030) *(Insert Link when live)*
- <sup>ii</sup> Paths Policy 2020
- <sup>iii</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>iv</sup> Epping Forest Byelaws & Additional Byelaws (1980/1986); 3(10) *Driving, moving, or using a bicycle, tricycle or vehicle upon the Forest to the danger, injury, annoyance or inconvenience of the public*.
- <sup>v</sup> Epping Forest Byelaws & Additional Byelaws (1980/1986); 3(45) *Making any improper or offensive use of the Forest or doing anything tending to the injury or disfigurement thereof or to the defeat of the general purposes of the Epping Forest Act 1878 or of these byelaws & Site of Scientific Interest (Epping Forest) Potentially Damaging Operations* [OLD1001814] point 21.
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/activities-in-epping-forest/cycling-in-epping-forest> (also appendix 1)
- <sup>vii</sup> Epping Forest Act 1878 principle duty *(insert link when live)*
- <sup>viii</sup> New homes proposed within local plans - 27,000 Waltham Forest Local Plan (2020-2035), 12,000 Redbridge Local Plan (2015-2030) & 39,000 Newham Local Plan (2017-2033)

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