

Committee(s)	Dated:
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	24 November 2020
Subject: 48 th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	11
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Y
If so, how much?	£5,460
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
Report of: Director of Markets and Consumer Protection	For Decision
Report author: Gavin Stedman, Port Health & Public Protection Director	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform your Committee of the outcome of the 48th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 17 October 2020 along the foreshore of the River Thames, downriver from the Port Health Lower Thames Office in Denton, Gravesend.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report;
- Review and approve the grant from City's Cash to partially fund the 2021 Experiment;
- Approve the 49th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment to take place in 2021 (date to be confirmed).

Main Report

Background

1. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment, which was first held in 1973, is an annual angling competition held along the foreshore of the River Thames, one and a half miles downriver from the Port Health River Division Office in Denton, Gravesend.

2. Your Committee has a long association with this event which is organised in collaboration with the Thames Angling Preservation Society and the Environment Agency.
3. In light of the current COVID-19 outbreak, we were unable to hold the event in its usual format this year. While this was disappointing, we were pleased to be able to proceed with a COVID-Secure, reduced-scale version which comprised the key element, i.e. the scientific research experiment.
4. The objective of the Experiment is to establish the environmental condition of the Thames through the number and size of fish species in evidence. Judging is based on the greatest variety of fish caught and a scoring system which rates fish according to scarcity and significance in the context of a cleaner river.
5. The Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation through the rules of the competition which require young and undersize fish to be returned immediately to the river once recorded.
6. The results of the Experiment provide valuable data to the Environment Agency, Thames Angling Preservation Society and members of the river community. It has the unique advantage of linking the recreational angling sector with conservation and scientific study. The event also encourages young people to take part in angling and develop an awareness and interest in the environmental condition of our rivers.

Current Position

7. On Saturday 17 October 2020, 24 adult anglers representing six teams competed for the Lady Howard Trophy which was awarded to the team with the highest score. A detailed report on the day, including results, feedback from participants and photographs, is available at Appendix A to this report.
8. Prizes were also awarded for the largest/best fish and the best individual catch. In addition, the angler with the overall catch judged to most demonstrate the continuing health and improvement of the River Thames was presented with the Biodiversity Award, which is sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators.
9. To ensure compliance with government COVID-Secure guidance, and the COVID-safe practices recommended by the Angling Trust, the format of this year's Experiment was as follows:
 - Six adult angling teams with 4 competitors each participated.
 - Each angler was pre-allocated a marked fishing peg/area which was sufficiently distanced from neighbouring anglers.
 - The competition was run on trust, with anglers recording details of their own catch.
 - Anglers and other attendees were asked to leave as soon as the fishing period was over. There was no judging, meal, or results ceremony.

- All results were determined during the week following the competition and the winners notified. Both the Fishmongers' Company and the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators assisted with judging the winners of their awards remotely (via email).
10. In contrast to the usual 150 attendees, this year, only 40 people were present. Attendees comprised:
- Keith Bottomley, Chairman of the PH&ES Committee
 - Jeremy Simons, Deputy Chairman of the PH&ES Committee
 - Jon Avern, Director of Markets and Consumer Protection
 - Gavin Stedman, Port Health & Public Protection Director
 - Reg Butcher of the Thames Angling Preservation Society.
 - 7 CoL staff
 - 24 anglers
 - 4 stewards

Results

11. 561 fish of 5 species were caught this year, 186 more than the previous year's total of 375 fish, and the highest total since 2015. The number of species represented in the catch was, however, lower last year's 7 species. Historical results data is shown in Appendix B to this report.
12. Details of the fish caught were recorded by stewards and points were awarded based on the recognised scoring system.

Species	Number Caught	Maximum Size	Minimum Size
Bass	4	27cm	12cm
Flounder	8	31cm	19cm
Plaice	1	33cm	-
Pouting	14	18cm	13cm
Whiting	534	35cm	16cm

Feedback from stakeholders

13. Representatives of the Institute of Fisheries Management and the recreational angling community have provided feedback on the Thames Fishery Research Experiment and its results. They acknowledge its importance in terms of providing valuable information about the environmental condition of the River Thames and in supporting river users.

The Institute of Fisheries Management

14. In 1992, the Environment Agency devised the modern Thames estuary fish survey programme, which became the national role model to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. Historic data sets are

invaluable in the context of understanding how fish ecology functions in highly dynamic places such as estuaries.

15. Before that work began, the only historic data sets that existed in the Thames were from power station intakes, most now closed. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment, with its long and consistent history back to 1973, stood out as a best practice example.
16. The Institute promotes and encourages more sustainable fisheries management. This has to be based upon a sound evidence base. Estuaries are some of the most productive ecosystems on the planet, supporting major marine fish nursery grounds as well as acting as vital migration corridors for a broad range of life stages and species. However, they are also highly dynamic, with most fish moving continuously in response to rapidly changing flows, salinity, temperature and their own seasonal rhythms. Long term data sets are vital to our growing understanding. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment remains a best practice example for others to follow.

The recreational angling community

17. The angling community's representative has commented as follows: 'The circumstances building up to this, the 48th Thames Fishery Research Experiment, have been unusual, unique and a huge challenge to organise in a safe and compliant way. The fact that the event was held at all was testament to the excellent planning skills, determination and drive of the organising team. The preparation was well thought out and the delivery on the day faultless.
18. Feedback from the anglers was extremely positive and full of praise on how smoothly things ran and how safe they felt.
19. Compared to a normal year, around one third of the usual number of anglers fished. This was in order to comply with social distancing requirements and the Angling Trust's fishing match guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic.
20. This reduction in participants did not, however, stop the fish biting. In fact, although the number of species were down on recent years, we had one of the best returns in the last decade regarding numbers of fish. Individual returns were very high in numbers but dominated by the Whiting species.
21. By supporting the event this year, you have maintained the consistency required to ensure that the results from all 48 years of the experiment can be properly analysed and reported. Anglers appreciate that the whole purpose of the event is to help us all better understand the changes that have taken place in the health of this great river and this year's catch returns have been exceptional.'

Proposals

22. The March 2016 Policy and Resources Committee agreed the transfer of funding commitments from Finance Grants Sub Committee to the relevant Committees for ongoing administration.
23. As a result of this transfer, your Committee is required to review and approve the annual grant from City's Cash to deliver the Thames Fishery Research Experiment. The amount of the grant for 2021/22 is yet to be confirmed as all budgets are currently under review, but it is likely to be subject to a 12% reduction.
24. I recommend that your Committee approves the continuation of funding from City's Cash towards this event, which provides valuable scientific information and supports the angling community. We hope that the 49th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment in 2021 will be able to return to its usual, full-scale format, which will require the full amount of the allocated grant.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

25. The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation through the rules of the competition which require young and undersize fish to be returned immediately to the river once recorded. Eels are not permitted to be taken away from the riverside due to the low numbers in the Thames and, in accordance with Marine Management Organisation rules, each angler may retain only one bass.
26. The continued support of your Committee has demonstrated the City's commitment to supporting communities.
27. Funding was provided through a grant of £5,460 from City's Cash. Financial contributions were not sought from other organisations this year, as we were unable to invite their representatives to attend.
28. Due the reduced scale of this year's experiment, the total cost was £3,650 which was £5,654 less than in 2019. As the full amount of the grant was not required this year, the unspent portion will be returned to City's Cash. These figures do not include staff costs or use of in-house resources.

Conclusions

29. The 2020 City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment was a successful event which was well supported. Although the full event could not take place this year, the Experiment itself again provided valuable data and information to associated organisations and the recreational angling community.
30. It is very much hoped that the 49th Experiment in 2021, if approved by your Committee, will return to its full-scale format and that we will be able to invite you all to attend, along with the usual participants and guests.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Report on Thames Fishery Research Experiment 2020
- Appendix B – Results data 2011-2020

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