

Committee(s): Epping Forest Consultative - For consultation Epping Forest and Commons - For decision	Dated: 23102020 08032021
Subject: Epping Forest Cycling Management Strategy (SEF 25/20b)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 3, 4 & 11
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
Report author: Laura Lawson, Projects and Policy Officer, Epping Forest	

Summary

This report presents to your Committee a proposed Cycling Management Strategy for Epping Forest outlining existing provision, management challenges currently presented by cycling activity in Epping Forest, and proposes a range of actions to address these.

Specifically, immediate actions include increasing engagement with the different cycling communities, allowing greater permissive cycling in Wanstead Park and identifying need for temporary cycling 'exclusion areas' to allow for damaged habitat recovery.

The draft Epping Forest Cycling Strategy was subject to stakeholder consultation in, late 2020, and this proposed strategy includes several amendments as suggested by consultees. A detailed consultation report was compiled and shared with stakeholders.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve, subject to the incorporation of any changes sought by this Committee the, Epping Forest Cycling Management Strategy attached as Appendix 1.

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 detailed 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.

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 decision by your Committee.
4. Responsible cycling is welcomed in Epping Forest and a Code of Conduct 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 from 10% in 2014, it and now accounts for 12-18% (2020) of Forest visits.
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 1) outlines the opportunities Epping Forest presents for recreational cyclists

whilst providing additional measures to manage the balance between visitors and protection of the Forest.

13. An initial draft Epping Forest Cycling Strategy was subject to stakeholder consultation in October 2020. A detailed report outlining amendments and inclusions suggested during consultation has been distributed to these stakeholders and this, the revised Strategy, presented to your Committee.

Options

14. 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.**
15. 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.**

Proposals

16. 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.
17. The strategy will be reviewed cyclically (initially after 12 months) to ensure that the content is relevant and responsive to the demands of the current time.
18. 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 by bicycle
 - g. A review of cycling in Wanstead Park with an aim to increase permissive use

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

19. The strategy supports the Corporate Plan (2018-23) outcomes – Contributes to a flourishing society (1 & 2) and Shape outstanding environments (11 & 12)

20. The strategy supports the Open Spaces Department Business Plan 2020/21 – outcomes 1, 3, 5, 7, 8 & 11.
21. 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 & resource implications

22. Initial actions proposed in the Strategy can be met within existing local risk budgets and staffing.
23. Potential future works, such as installation of additional secure cycling parking at car parks, will be subject to securing additional external funding as outlined in the Strategy.

Legal implications

24. The City is required to keep Epping Forest for the recreation and enjoyment of the public and to preserve the natural aspect of the Forest as far as possible (S.7 Epping Forest Act 1878).

Risk implications

25. Directing cyclists to routes will involve carrying out a risk assessment and carrying out periodic inspections in order to manage potential exceptional hazards such as fallen trees or significant erosion. However, information provided to users will make clear that the routes are permissive for cycling, not specifically for, and are part of a natural environment and as such will involve uneven surfaces whose condition will be subject to weather impacts and natural obstacles.

Equalities implications

26. An initial Test of Relevance (Appendix 3) screening exercise of the equality impact of this decision has been undertaken by Epping Forest.
27. Consideration has also been given to consultation feedback expressing concern that the lack of tarmac paths for cyclists disproportionately affects cyclists with protected characteristics which make it more difficult for them to negotiate routes. It is acknowledged that uneven surfaces and other obstacles are an integral part of the natural environment which could make cycling on the routes more difficult or impossible for people with disabilities who might otherwise wish to use them. The provision of made-up paths for cyclists is not proposed due to the requirement to preserve the natural aspect of the Forest. However, any adverse impact is mitigated by the provision of maintained, less rough routes for walkers and wheelchair users. The separation of cyclists away from other visitors is also considered to improve conditions for those other visitors with protected characteristics which limit their mobility or vision. The proposals are therefore considered justified. Other than in respect of the consultation response there are not considered to be any negative impacts on any protected equality groups.

Climate implications

28. By improving the cycling offer and working with partners to better link the Forest with local communities, active travel will be a more appealing choice. Shifts to

active transport and non-vehicular access to the Forest, should have a positive impact on carbon emissions and air quality.

Security implications

29. None.

Charity implications

30. Epping Forest is a registered charity (No. 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.

Epping Forest Consultative Committee

31. The Consultative Committee considered the initial draft Epping Forest Cycling Strategy at their meeting of the 21 October 2020 and the following was noted;
- a. further consideration be given to members suggested cycle routes
 - b. further consideration be given to the bicycle parking
 - c. consideration be given to safety concerns particularly the relationship between cyclists and horse riders sharing the Forest paths
 - d. Members asked that the timeline be extended for Epping Forest and Commons Committee decision, from November 2020 to March 2021.
32. Points a to c above have been addressed in the revised Strategy document with further partnership work to be progressed, for the suggested Wanstead Park route.

Conclusion

33. 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 Epping Forest Cycling Strategy

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