

<b>Committee:</b> Epping Forest & Commons Committee – For decision	<b>Dated:</b> 10 May 2021
<b>Subject:</b> Epping Forest Work Programme 2021/2022 (SEF 20/21)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	2, 11, 12
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	Y
If so, how much?	
What is the source of Funding?	Local Risk including external grant aid
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Yes
<b>Report of</b> Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report authors:</b> Geoff Sinclair and Jeremy Dagley, Epping Forest	

### Summary

The work described in this report covers a large number of the 38 Forest and 14 Buffer Land compartments.

The varied programme of habitat work is the continuation of several decades of conservation work and will be carried out largely by in-house teams, but with significant contributions from contractors and volunteers. The continued conservation of Forest habitats maintains continuing progress to achieve both the *favourable condition* of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and *favourable conservation status* of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The work proposed this year would be part of a new 10-year programme agreed with and assented by Natural England (NE) and is supported by a new Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) annual revenue grant worth £1.39M, administered and inspected by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). One-off restoration works, largely tree-felling, would be supported by 100% grant-aid over the next two years and are to be carried out by external contractors. The habitat conservation work centres on the re-pollarding of ancient hornbeams, where a pollard cycle has been established over the last 30 years, and the continuation of the restoration of wood-pasture

habitats around them. Grassland and heathland management continues to be managed by a combination of extensive grazing by Longhorn cattle and mowing. The grazing programme sees a significant enlargement of the grazing area, with three new locations to be grazed, including the ancient wood-pasture of Barn Hoppitt. This enlargement has been possible as a result of a successful grant award for new invisible fencing equipment, allowing the replacement of the buried-wire *Boviguard*™ system after 10 years with the new GPS-based *NoFence*™ system. The mowing work includes the specialist activities of haymaking and fire risk reduction.

The access management programme addresses work in response to car park charging, improvements and maintenance of the path network and promoting more sustainable access in line with the new *Epping Forest Management Strategy* approved last November. The risk management and resilient environment work involves significant operations in relation to large raised reservoirs, a continuation of the survey and control of the Oak Processionary Moth populations across all the key visitor “hubs” in the Forest and the Forest-wide management of tree safety, which is likely to occupy one arborist team for the whole year. Local partners have secured funding that will allow work to progress on the conservation of the Grotto and the creation of a natural play area at Wanstead Park

### **Recommendation(s)**

Members are asked to:

- i. Approve the annual work programme as summarised in the main report.

### **Main Report**

#### **Background**

1. This report describes significant habitat and heritage conservation, visitor access and risk management projects proposed in Epping Forest for the programme year 2021-2022.
2. The work outlined below is drawn from the 2020-2030 Epping Forest Management Strategy and its supporting documents (see *Background* papers below).

#### **Current Position**

3. As reported to your Committee on 8 March 2021 a 10-year Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) grant has been agreed with Natural England (NE) and the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). The finalised agreement provides, approximately, £1.39 Million of financial support for habitat conservation work. The agreement went live on 6 April 2021 but runs for the period from 1 January 2020 until 31 December 2029.

4. A total of 110ha of our grass and haylage cutting and the bulk of our 73 km of highway verge cutting is undertaken by local contractors. Following completion of the current three-year agreements these contracts will be retendered in 2021.
5. A £15,000 grant, awarded to the Rare Breeds Survival Trust in March 2021 working in partnership with the Epping Forest Conservation team, has allowed the purchase of 50 new cow collars for the GPS invisible fencing system. This grant covers 100% of all the hardware and equipment costs and provides a significant investment in a new era of grazing management. This will allow many more areas of Forest to be covered, including areas not grazed for many years (see below and **Appendix 2**).

## **Proposals**

6. The work programme sets out work under four of the five Strategic Priorities of the new *Epping Forest Management Strategy*. Within the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) all proposals that may impact on the protected habitats and features would be subject to prior formal written assent from Natural England (NE). For all the CSS proposals outlined below, assent has been given by NE as part of the 10-year legal agreement for the habitat works.

### **Strategic Priority - *A Beautiful Forest, sustaining an internationally and nationally important mosaic of wildlife habitats***

#### Wood pasture restoration

7. The delayed completion of the CSS agreement means that some of the habitat work locations, especially the work to be carried out by contractors, are still to be finalised at the time of drafting this report. However, with the support of the CSS grant funding, the following habitat conservation programme would be delivered for the period up to 31 March 2022:
8. Re-pollarding work would be carried out on up to 300 ancient Hornbeam pollards trees. This pollarding continues over 30 years of cyclical work, rejuvenating this wood-pasture habitat across the Forest. The operations will be undertaken by an Epping Forest in-house arborist team, with the bulk of this year's lopping work likely to be concentrated in Bury Wood (Compartment 24- see Appendix 1 for Compartments map), and Walthamstow Forest (Compartment 34), with smaller amounts possible in Powell's Forest (Compartment 23), Debden Slade (Compartment 19) and Hangboy Slade (Compartment 12).
9. Some of this will involve lopping in summer when drier ground conditions allow easier access into some of the wetter areas of the Forest, thereby reducing ground impacts (e.g. Honey Lane Quarters (Compartment 9), Deershelter Plain (Compartment 11) and Hill Wood near Suntrap Stream (Compartment 21)). Any work at High Beach close to the Pillow Mounds (Compartment 14) would also take place in the summer.

10. Some work may also be undertaken on crown reducing the small number of keystone ancient Beech pollards in North Long Hills (Compartment 22) ahead of tree-felling around them by contractors.
11. The limited use of contractors will be concentrated on such tree-felling operations, supported by a 100% funding subsidy from the CSS grant. These felling works are to be completed by the end of December 2022 and are targeted at removing younger trees over-shading and outcompeting the ancient pollards, especially the small but ancient oaks scattered across these compartments.
12. In addition to the works required at North Long Hills, the main concentration of contractor felling work will be in Bury Wood (Compartment 24) and in Chingford Wood and Chingford Plain, south of Jubilee Ride (Compartment 26). Other smaller areas of felling include Honey Lane Quarters (Compartment 9) and at Warren Hill (Compartment 28) to remove some non-native Turkey Oak and Norway Maple. Sweet Chestnut will be retained as this provides similar dead wood habitats to early-stage hollowing oaks and is an important bridge for the generation gap between ancient oaks and oak regeneration.
13. Alongside the felling operations and Hornbeam pollarding, there will be continued restoration and maintenance of the wood-pasture sites opened up over the last decade. This work will be carried out by a combination of extensive grazing, flailing by the in-house teams, some small tree regeneration removal and some grass cutting. This would amount to work across an area of about 140 ha. The exact acreage cut during the late summer will be determined by a site review to assess which sites require an annual cut and which others may require a rotational cut every other year or longer. The impact of the cattle grazing in the wood-pasture areas would also be assessed.
14. Rhododendron removal or control remains an important conservation task in the face of the water-mould species, *Phytophthora ramorum*, outbreak, which is continuing across England in 2021. Contractors would be employed to remove old stands by machine at Paul's Nursery – 100% grant-aided by the CSS. Meanwhile volunteers would be involved with controlling the regrowth of the species at St Thomas's Quarters (Compartment 6), and Oak Hill (Compartment 12).

#### Grasslands, Heathlands and Grazing

15. In the meantime, on the Forest's open plains and conservation grasslands, including the important rush pastures of Almshouse and Whitehouse Plains and the boulder-clay meadows of the western flank of the Forest, grazing and mowing will be combined as in previous years. This combination would be managed to ensure a varied sward height and ensure flowering for pollinating insects throughout the summer season.
16. For the general grass programme, we continue to seek to increase the area cut by contractors, especially from mid to late summer. This will free up staff time to focus on the CSS grant requirement for the maintenance of wood-pasture by tractor mounted flailing (see paragraph 12 above) and also for the management of wildfire breaks and emergency access zones (see *A Resilient Environment* below).

17. Late summer hay-cuts will be taken to ensure a good establishment of the flowers at the newly-created wildflower meadow sites at Whipps Cross (Compartment 36) and Wanstead Flats (Compartment 38), the latter on the area of Manor Park Flats occupied by the Temporary Mortuary Facility.
18. To maintain areas of grassland for nesting Skylark and Meadow Pipit (both species are declining nationally and locally), 5.15ha has been enclosed on Wanstead Flats to restrict disturbance of these birds by dogs (see map at **Appendix 3**). The effectiveness of this project will be reviewed with the help of volunteers from the Wren Conservation Group (see below) and future plans will be revised as required.
19. Grazing and bracken control work will continue on the six main heathland sites which are integral to the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designation. In addition, volunteers from the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) will continue their long-term conservation work on these sites helping to control bramble regrowth and tree establishment amongst the heather and other rare heathland flora.
20. Following last year's trials with the GPS invisible fencing system *NoFence*<sup>™</sup>, and as a result of the success of the grant application (see paragraph 6 above) securing 50 collars, the buried-wire *Boviguard*<sup>™</sup> system will be entirely replaced after 10-years' of service. The new GPS collars will allow grazing management to be applied to a greater area of the Forest and three new sites would be grazed this year, for the first time in many decades: Barn Hoppitt (Compartment 29), Yates's Meadow & Yardley Hill (Compartment 25) and Warren Hill (Compartment 28).
21. One of the new areas for grazing last year was the very popular introduction of grazing at Wanstead Park. It is proposed that this would be continued in 2021 at a similar time of the year, with the area grazed extended to include the Long Walk (The Glade) ride, as well as the previously grazed East Plain. In 2020 local volunteer cattle watchers were crucial to the success of this project and we plan to continue this very welcome community partnership this year. It is proposed that the same number of cattle would be used, three cows, with two of these being the same individuals as last year.
22. The full grazing programme is attached at **Appendix 2**.

#### Ponds and Lakes

23. Monthly monitoring for Floating Pennywort at Wanstead Park will be continued during 2021 using a specialist contractor, with any outbreaks responded to as they appear.
24. Substantial bankside erosion at Jubilee Pond has resulted in the pond liner, which was installed in 2014, becoming exposed for large sections of the pond margin and around the islands with air bubbles causing significant lifting of the liner in places. A report prepared by the City Surveyors Department during 2020 identified the need for £98,582 of essential repairs to prevent the continued decline and probable failure of the pond liner. During 2021 we will work with the City

Surveyors Department to identify a way forward to resolve the developing issues with the pond. The report also highlighted the partial success of previous works by staff and Epping Forest Heritage Trust volunteers to protect the liner and, with modifications recommended in the report, a continuation of this work may be undertaken in 2021.

25. The charity *Froglife* successfully completed restoration and enhancement works on the Cow Pond, Leyton Flats, through a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The biodiversity benefits of this pond work will be further enhanced, as resources allow, by work to improve access and open up scrub habitats and glades in the surrounding oak woodland, leading to the wild-flower meadow opposite the new Whipps Cross bus station and cycleway (see also paragraph 16 above).

#### Volunteer Habitat Management Activity

26. The Wren Conservation Group continues to provide great support to Forest habitat and species conservation in the south of the Forest, around Wanstead in particular. Its work to manage the grassland mosaic at the Exchange Lands (Compartment 37) south of Wanstead Park, would continue to keep mixed grassland and scrub habitats open that support important butterfly populations, including the relatively scarce Brown Argus. The Group is also playing a key role in monitoring the Skylark population of Wanstead Flats (Compartment 38) and providing volunteers to monitor the success of the fenced areas and answer visitors' questions about the Skylark protection project.
27. In addition to the important Rhododendron control work, the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) would also continue their varied and invaluable task programme across the Forest, focusing on the wood-pasture restoration areas, heathlands (as above), ponds and bogs. Their work on wetland sites, in particular, has been critical to the maintenance of the special wildlife interest in these places. The EFCV would be working on at least six key bog locations over the next year, with the bogs being part of the wet heath SAC feature supporting many rare species from this threatened habitat.
28. The Swaines Green volunteers, Highams Park Snedders and Epping Forest Heritage Trust volunteers also undertake significant works in various parts of the Forest and help to deliver a range of projects to improve the local environment, for both habitats and access, as part of agreed work programmes.
29. During 2021 the Epping Forest Volunteer Wardens will continue with their work on site patrol, auditing of the condition of the path network and cattle monitoring.

#### Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) work

30. Monitoring of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM), using external consultants, would continue over all the main sites as in 2020, with control measures taken as required. It is expected to see a year-on-year increase in the number of trees affected and the number of OPM nests. Importantly spraying work has been limited by agreement with Forestry Commission (FC) and NE, and nest removal is being prioritised in most areas of the SSSI instead. Removal of nests, as in 2020,

will be targeted to where the most immediate risks of exposure to visitors are found and as directed by the statutory notices served by the FC.

31. Ramorum monitoring will be continued across all Rhododendron sites, both existing and historic, including Knighton Woods, Wanstead Park, Pauls Nursery and The Warren Plantation.
32. The annual Japanese Knotweed control will be carried out across any remaining sites as required.

### **Strategic Priority - A Welcoming Destination for all**

#### **Ride and Path Management**

33. In line with the recommendations of the Path Management Policy Development Note (PDN), approved by your committee on 16 November 2020, it is planned that path management is concentrated on the high access categories of Red+ and Red. This prioritisation will ensure we develop a better understanding of the full impact of the changes introduced in the Path Management PDN in a phased way while ensuring the high-risk access areas are managed. During 2021 approximately 31 km of path would have a 1.5m verge cut along both sides subject to assent from NE where pathways lie within the SSSI areas.
34. Ongoing vegetation management to improve the accessibility, definition and ability of paths to dry out following winter would continue during 2021. It is proposed that work continues south from Highams Park along the main north-south route, in Walthamstow Forest (Compartment 34) with some work in Highams Park (Compartment 33) to finish work started in 2020.
35. If resources allow the path along the north and west sides (Path numbers G21-1 and 2) of Hill Wood (Compartment 21) and part of Fairmead & Whitehouse Plain (Compartment 22) would have scrub and minor tree felling to define the route more clearly and to aid the path recovery following wet weather. Such work would be coordinated with the wood pasture restoration CSS works outlined above where any overlap is identified and would be subject to the requirement for SSSI assent from NE. Additional path works are outlined below for Wanstead Park.
36. An assessment of the condition of paths following the wet winter and the much-increased use was undertaken. At the time of this report the results of this survey have still to be reviewed. For existing surfaced paths, a surface improvement programme will be developed in 2021 and works implemented as funds allow during this year, with SSSI assent sought from NE, as required by the character of the working areas proposed.
37. The High Beach ISP identified the relative remoteness of High Beach and the higher than average reliance on cars to reach the area. During 2021 we will undertake work to define and waymark a route to help visitors find a safe route from Loughton station to High Beach via Forest paths. This is a project being undertaken in partnership with the Epping Forest Heritage Trust.

- 38.To encourage residents to access the Forest closer to home, rather than to drive to a car park, we will create a local access hub in the Goldings Hill area. This will include improved waymarking and more clearly defined paths as well as local promotion to encourage more sustainable visiting and is a test project to assess its effectiveness to discourage car use.
- 39.Following the introduction of car park charging we will be implementing an enhanced maintenance regime in the main car parks of the Forest to which charging applies. This will include vegetation management, sign maintenance and cleanliness.

### **Strategic Priority - *Special Heritage Landscapes – protected and celebrated***

#### Wanstead Park: Parkland Plan

- 40.Through local partners we have obtained funding to progress important aspects of the Wanstead Park Parkland Plan and The Grotto: Conservation Management Plan. We are also working with key stakeholders to identify additional funding and these projects are outlined below:
- 40.1 Play area: The Aldersbrook Residents Association have offered funding towards the creation of a simple natural play area based on timber from Epping Forest and installed by in-house staff and volunteers. A working group has been established to develop costed proposals and to prepare designs for a joint Epping Forest Charitable Trust and Community managed natural play area. It is anticipated that additional fund-raising will be required to deliver this project.
- 40.2 The Grotto. The Friends of Wanstead Parkland (FoWP) and the Historic London Trust (HLT) have jointly raised £24,000 towards restoring the landing stage to the Grotto. The landing stage has sadly started to erode significantly and to lose its integrity and repair work is urgently required. Alongside the City Surveyors department, we will be working with the FoWP and HLT to deliver this project in 2021. The support from FowP and HLT is very welcome and has ensured we can deliver this much needed work.
- 40.3 Water supply management: We have been working with our partners Thames 21 to identify funding to enable us to progress water management projects in Wanstead Park in line with the Wanstead Park: Wetland Improvement Proposals approved by your committee on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021. We will continue this work and progress works where funding allows.
- 40.4 Signage: The FoWP have successfully raised the funds to pay for the installation of ten new finger posts in the park. The finger posts form part of proposals to help visitors new to the park to find their way around. We will be working with the FoWP on the installation of these signs in the year.
- 40.5 Vegetation management: Targeted work to open key vistas and paths will be continued when resources allow.



## Highams Park

41. Spa Flow Limited completed a report and feasibility study for options to improve the banks of Highams Park lake. The report identifies eight areas of the lake margin where work is recommended to ensure bank stability and to respond to polluted water. Working with the City Surveyors Department it is proposed that we start to progress work on these improvements. Environmental mitigation funding from a local development has been received which identifies the reed bed establishment as a project to be delivered. Consent would be sought from Natural England (NE) once details are finalised.
42. The Highams Park Snedders will be embarking on a long-term plan to promote and encourage the population of bluebells towards the NW of the Park. Following the mapping of the bluebells existing paths will be defined with log edging to deter people from walking on the bluebells. Works to reduce competition from holly and brambles will start from the late summer 2021.
43. Responding to COVID-19 in 2020 prevented work with local volunteers to seek funding for work proposals through the Park identified in the Highams Park Individual Site Plan. This work has been rolled forward into 2021 and we will first produce a costed action plan based on proposals in the ISP and any consents/assents from NE will be sought as required.

## Loughton Camp Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)

44. At Loughton Camp, with grant-aid from the newly agreed Countryside Stewardship Scheme grant (CSS) supported by Historic England, holly and other small and medium-sized infilling trees will be cleared. This will involve felling work and careful removal of woody debris, in order to protect the ancient earthworks of this protected iron-age hillfort from the impact of roots and loss of visibility of the archaeological structures. The work will be carried out by hand and/or in a manner that protects the earthworks from machinery damage.

## Churchill Avenue: Woodford Green

45. A community and stakeholder information process was undertaken in 2019 on proposals for the phased replacement, for tree safety reasons, of the London Plane and Poplar tree avenue at Woodford Green. Proposals have been submitted to the London Borough of Redbridge for permission to undertake the work however agreement was not forthcoming in time for the work to be undertaken in 2019 as originally planned.
46. It was proposed that we undertake the phased replanting of the avenue with Common Lime (*Tilia x europea*) with work commencing in September 2020 however COVID work commitments meant that we could not progress this work. Eight poplar trees were repollarded in 2020 as a short-term measure due to the

unsafe condition of the trees. It is proposed that we start work on the phased replacement of the avenue in September 2021.

## Key Views

47. Surveys of nine key views in Forest were undertaken in 2020 and compared the condition of each view today to earlier photographs. Where work was considered necessary to maintain or restore a view the work needs were assessed. During 2021 we will compile these work strands into a single plan and if resources allow it is hoped we can start work on some aspects of this landscape improvement project.

## Strategic Priority - *A Resilient Environment*

### Highway Verge Management

48. Ongoing maintenance of highways edge vegetation is largely contracted out through a three-year agreement with a local provider. In-house teams focus on the more challenging locations where there are significant constraints, such as frequent parked cars, and on maintaining sightlines at path and road junctions. The highway verge contract will be retendered in 2021.

### Tree Safety

49. Trees identified for hazard removal will be a significant proportion of spring and summer programmes for the Arborist Teams. The annual tree safety survey programme is undertaken by contractors and this is to be retendered this year on a three-year basis. Overall, works to make good hazardous trees takes up the equivalent of one arborist team's year. Staff restrictions due to COVID-19 has meant that we have a backlog of work from 2020 to complete this year. It is anticipated that this may be a further difficult year as arborist teams may need to be called on to support essential visitor management issues across the Forest as was the case in 2020.

### Fire Safety

50. As described above under *Grasslands* management, fire control zones will continue to be mown at Leyton and Wanstead Flats, with the areas managed (including the 6km of routes already cut annually) refined by a survey carried out in 2019 by a specialist fire management consultant. Along the key routes around the edges of these two large grassland sites, grass will either be cut regularly to ensure a short sward along the routes for a 6m width or grass cuttings will be removed after each main cut (depending on the area mown).

51. In addition, areas of older and dead gorse will be cut back and incorporated in regular flailing work at Leyton Flats, particularly the areas of gorse in the south of the Flats close to the boundary pathways.

52. Other areas of open land in the Forest, including Chingford Plain and the heathland sites were also risk assessed. The existing management at these smaller sites was enough for the control of fire risk. All the risk assessments and associated mapping will be provided to the local fire service for their approval prior to summer 2021 and a site visit has been arranged with the Essex Fire Service for May 2021. This action has been rolled forward from 2020 due to COVID restrictions.

#### Insurance Claims

53. Claims for damages due to tree root related subsidence came in at nearly 2 per month in 2020. This reflects an established pattern of increased claims following dry summers. Several long-standing claims are nearing resolution this year where root barriers may need to be installed which will prevent the need to underpin properties at a substantially higher cost. For claims under £1 million the City Corporation pays the claim directly so achieving reductions in the insurance costs, through installing a root barrier, can represent a substantial saving to the City Corporation.

54. In addition to the case by case response process we commenced work in 2019 to reduce the tree cover along Mays Lane, Chingford. Reducing the tree cover will help to reduce subsidence and tree safety liabilities and will also provide the opportunity to improve a currently overlooked part of the Forest. Work on Mays Lane will be ongoing through 2021

#### Large Raised Reservoirs (LRR):

55. Woody and herbaceous vegetation will be kept cut on raised reservoirs. Further works will follow on from the six-monthly Panel engineer inspections and will be undertaken in association with the Built Environment Department.

56. The Department of Built Environment will commence work in late summer on the dam at the Deer Sanctuary (Birch Hall Park) Pond (Compartment 59). This work aims to repair and stabilise the dam and improve the spillway. Planning permission has been received for this work.

57. The Department of Built Environment is developing plans to respond to leaks in the substantial Baldwins Pond dam (at the border of Compartments 16 & 20). A design and build contractor is to be appointed and local discussions with stakeholders have commenced to raise awareness of the project. A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) framework has been set out for the contractor to consider and the appointed contractor will need to complete the HRA before any work can commence.

58. The key issues for the HRA to consider are the access route options and working methods, as the dam works themselves are exempt from the Regulations being important for the protection of the SAC habitats downstream. Dependent on the outcome of the HRA, tree works are likely to be required to open the main route chosen for the works and would be undertaken during late summer 2021 if SAC/SSSI assent is received. The likely route or routes are very steep, on clay

soils and in poor condition and the tree work would need to be undertaken in dry conditions. Work on the dam itself is scheduled to begin in summer 2022

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

### Epping Forest Consultative Committee Feedback

59. Due to the delay with the CSS agreement this work programme could not be taken to the Consultative Committee meeting in February. This report will be taken onto the Consultative Committee meeting in June 2021 for comments and observations.

### Strategic implications

60. The work outlined in this work programme will contribute significantly to City of London Corporate Plan 2018-2023 Outcome 2 *People enjoy good health and well-being*; Outcome 11: *We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment* and Outcome 12: *Our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained*.

61. The proposed work programme actions support the Open Spaces Department's Vision of enriching people's lives by enhancing and providing access to ecologically diverse open spaces and outstanding heritage assets across London and beyond.

62. The proposed action meets the Open Spaces Department's objective of '*Open spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible*'. It will also contribute to the Department's performance measures of the condition of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), active ancient tree management and income generation.

63. The work programme aims to protect biodiversity whilst improving opportunities for visitors to enjoy the Forest. The programme derives from the new *Epping Forest Management Strategy* the vision of which is: *Epping Forest is a thriving, biodiverse green space that benefits the City of London's communities and enhances the wider environment as part of a larger interconnected landscape*. The proposals meet a wide range of outcomes identified in this Strategy, with the proposals detailed under each of the Plan's five 'Strategic Priorities'.

### Financial implications

64. The work outlined in the proposed work programme is to be covered by the local risk budget of Epping Forest Division and both revenue and capital funding through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, administered by the Rural Payments Agency. Additional grant aid and public fundraising would be sought where available to fund agreed activities.

65. Several projects have been identified which will only be progressed if additional financial and practical support can be obtained, including funding from the EA.

#### Legal implications

66. Formal consent for these works has been (e.g. CSS projects) or, once details available, would be sought from Natural England under Section 28E of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) for the SSSI and as required under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 in relation to the SAC. Additional consents for work in locally listed landscapes and APAs will be sought during the year. Any work on main watercourses would be carried out with the agreement of the Environment Agency.

67. Subject to the provisions of the Epping Forest Acts 1878 & 1880 the Conservators are under a duty at all times to keep Epping Forest uninclosed and unbuilt on as an open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public. They are also under a duty at all times as far as possible to preserve the natural aspect of the Forest.

68. The Epping Forest Act 1880 includes an additional power at section 5 to maintain "*ornamental inclosed lands*" which most probably reflects the City Corporation's purchase of Wanstead Park in 1880 and requires the Conservators to make proper provision for securing the enjoyment thereof by the public for exercise and recreation at all reasonable times during the day.

#### Charity Implications:

69. Open Spaces 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.

#### Risk implications

70. Individual work programme operations would be subject to current rigorous Health and Safety Risk Assessments and method statements.

71. The CSS work programme elements would be subject to external inspections to ensure cross compliance standards have been adhered to and work completed as specified. Failure to meet standards or to complete certain work prescriptions as defined in the CSS agreement may be subject to financial penalties. For non-CSS works within the SSSI, conditions of any NE assents must be met.

#### Equalities implications

72. No negative equality impacts were identified for this work programme.

#### Climate implications

73.The work programme has not been reviewed overall but as the City Corporation's Climate Action Strategy and the Open Spaces Carbon Removals Project get underway some assessment work will be carried out in relation to the wood-pasture and pollarding operations and their wood products in particular.

Security implications

74.None.

## **Conclusions**

75.The habitat work programme outlined above reflects the key priorities for the protection of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation. It incorporates the habitat conservation proposals which have been approved by your Committee and assented by Natural England as part of a new 10-year Countryside Stewardship grant application running until 2030.

76.The access and risk management work proposals also reflect the outcome of detailed fieldwork and regular surveys of the condition of the Forest's infrastructure and boundaries. The proposals would be subject to SSSI assent as required.

77.Volunteers will continue to be instrumental in delivering a significant proportion of the work on a number of key projects in 2021/22, including wood-pasture, wet heath and bog restoration, bogs and species protection, including Skylarks and butterflies. Their important and integral contribution to the Forest Management Strategy's Strategic Objectives is acknowledged.

78.Specialist in-house teams will deliver most of the work detailed in the report. Contractors will be used to for tree-felling where 100% grant support through CSS is available and will also contribute significantly to the implementation of the grass-cutting and highway vegetation management works across the Forest and the Buffer Land grasslands.

79.Substantial financial support has been achieved for key projects through external grant aid to the City Corporation or through partner organisations and is subject to external audit and inspection.

## **Appendices**

- **Appendix 1:** Forest Compartments Map.
- **Appendix 2:** proposed Grazing Programme (subject to weather & ground conditions)
- **Appendix 3:** Map of temporarily fenced areas to protect nesting Skylarks

## **Background Papers**

- A Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest 2020-30
- SEF13/21 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: The 2019 Countryside Stewardship Grant Agreement Amendment. 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021.
- SEF28/19 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: Countryside Stewardship Grant 2019 Proposals. 8<sup>th</sup> July 2019.
- The Barn Hoppitt Wood-pasture Restoration Plan 2006-2011.
- The Lords Bushes and Knighton Woods Integrated Site Plan 2004-2010.
- High Beach Individual Site Management Plan (2020)
- The Wanstead Flats Individual Site Management Plan (2020).
- Theydon Bois Green Individual Site Management Plan (2018)
- Highams Park, Little Sale and Oak Hill Woods ISMP Plan (2019)
- Leyton Flats Individual Site Management Plan (2019)
- Path Management Policy Development Note (2020)
- The Grotto Conservation Management Plan (2020)
- *Branching Out* Project (Nov 2008) – Keystone Tree & Grazing Strategies.
- SEF 01/13 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: Grazing Expansion Plan for Implementing the Epping Forest Grazing Strategy. 13th Feb 2013.
- Wanstead Park Conceptual Options Plan (2019).
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