

Committee(s)	Dated:
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	23 November 2021
Subject: 49 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?	£4,800
What is the source of Funding?	£4,800 City's Cash Grant
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
Report of: Executive Director, Environment	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 49th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 18 September 2021 along the foreshore of the River Thames, downriver from the Port Health Lower Thames Office in Denton, Gravesend. You are also asked to approve the proposal to proceed with the 50th Experiment in 2022.

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 2022 Experiment;
- Approve the 50th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment to take place in 2022 (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. The objective of the Experiment is to establish the environmental condition of the Thames through the variety, number and size of fish species in evidence. The scoring system and judging criteria assess the catch according to scarcity and significance in the context of a cleaner river. Over the years, the experiment has proven that the Thames remains the cleanest river in Northern Europe.
4. The Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation. The competition rules comply with advice and guidance issued by the Angling Trust and stewards oversee the anglers to make sure the rules are followed. Participants are advised about the proper handling of fish to minimise mortality and all young and undersize fish are returned to the river immediately once they have been recorded. The results of the Experiment provide valuable data to the Environment Agency, Thames Angling Preservation Society and members of the river community.
5. The event has the unique advantage of linking the river's recreational angling community with conservation and scientific study and is one of the earliest examples of a citizen science project. It also provides an opportunity for young people to take part in angling and develop an awareness and interest in the environmental condition of our rivers.
6. The Experiment brings together a diverse range of individuals and organisations who all have one thing in common: a passion for the conservation of the River Thames and the sustainability of the species which live in it.
7. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were only able proceed with a limited version of the event which comprised just the angling competition, i.e. the scientific research experiment. This year, we were very pleased to make a return to the usual format, albeit still on a slightly reduced scale.
8. In light of the continued uncertainty around COVID-related restrictions, we took a 'cautious' approach, inviting fewer anglers and guests to attend than we normally would. This enabled us to maintain a reasonable level of social distancing and make the event as safe as possible for all.

Current Position

9. On Saturday 18 September 2021, 31 adult anglers representing eight teams competed for the Lady Howard Trophy which was awarded to the team with the highest score. Additionally, eight school-aged anglers, including a team from the City of London School for Girls, competed for the PLA-sponsored Schools' Trophy. Details of all the competing teams are shown in the summary of results provided at Appendix A.
10. Prizes were also awarded for the largest/best fish and the best individual catch by an adult and by a member of a school team. 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.

11. Fishing took place between 09:00 and 13:00 and was followed by judging of the largest/best fish by the Thames Angling Preservation Society and The Fishmongers' Company. Competitors and guests then gathered in a marquee for lunch and the presentation of awards. Commemorative badges were presented to all newcomers by your Chairman, Deputy Keith Bottomley, who also hosted the event.
12. In contrast to the usual 150 attendees, this year, to ensure a COVID-safe event, only 90 people were present. The day was a great success and enjoyed by all participating anglers and guests. The warm and sunny weather conditions were very unusual for this event, but were most welcome.

Principal VIPs / guests were:

- Sheriff Christopher Hayward and Mrs Alexandra Hayward
- Sheriff-Elect Alderman Alison Gowman and Mr Glenn Hurstfield
- Sir David Howard and Lady Valerie Howard
- Martin Bigg (Walbrook Warden of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators') and Mrs Eileen Bigg
- Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee, Deputy Catherine McGuinness
- Chief Commoner, Deputy Brian Mooney

Other guests included:

- Members of the PH&ES Committee
- Representatives of:
 - The Environment Agency
 - The Fishmongers' Company
 - Port of London Authority
 - Thames21

Results

13. 90 fish of 5 species were caught this year: 471 fewer than the previous year's total of 534 fish, and 285 less than in 2019. The number of species represented in the catch was, however, the same as that in 2020.

2021 Results			
Species	Number Caught	Minimum Size	Maximum Size
Bass	8	18cm	32cm
Eel	14	20cm	60cm
Flounder	21	17cm	33cm
Pouting	13	12cm	20cm
Whiting	34	11cm	27cm

14. Several factors may have influenced the size and variety of this year's catch, but it is likely that the event being held in September rather than October (due to tidal patterns) and the unusually warm temperature played a role.
15. Results data for the past 10 years is provided at Appendix B to this report.

Feedback from stakeholders

16. Positive feedback was received from many of the participating anglers and guests. Stakeholders continue to acknowledge the importance of the Experiment in terms of providing valuable information about the environmental condition of the River Thames and in supporting river users.

The recreational angling community

17. The angling community's representative has commented as follows: "This year's Experiment was fished in much the same format as 2020 with four anglers per team, rather than the usual eight, in order to ensure a low risk, COVID-compliant, event.
18. An important difference, though, was that two teams of school students were able to participate again this year. It is so important that young people both understand the importance of the River Thames to the marine environment and the way this Experiment plays its part in helping us monitor progress in improving the health of this great river.
19. What was remarkable was that one of our young angling teams landed two Bass, a Flounder and an Eel to secure 45 points, more than half the points totalled by some of the adult teams. This was also the first time most of these youngsters had fished.
20. The experiment was held earlier in the season than previous years, following detailed analysis to find the tide that ensured the best and safest fishing time. This inevitably led to less Whiting, a winter species, being caught and therefore fewer fish in total. This was also compounded by a smaller number of anglers taking part.
21. However, there was a good showing of summer species including Bass, Eels and Flounders, with the winner of the Biodiversity Award having three of these species in his catch. A sixty centimetre Eel was one of 14 landed and released and we could be seeing signs of a turning point in the recovery of this endangered species. This is consistent with reports from other anglers across the estuary.
22. With regards to the adult team results, it was good to see a new name holding the Lady Howard Trophy this year, Charles Stanley, although there were only fifteen points and three fish separating the top three teams.

23. On a personal level, I was honoured to spend my day assisting the PH&ES Committee Team. We had four species and a lot of fun. More importantly, it helped me to understand the high level of importance seen in this event and appreciate the support behind it.
24. Finally, a big thank you to the organisers, sponsors, stewards, and those who coached, and donated equipment and bait to, the student angling teams.”

Financial summary

25. The total cost of this year’s event was £10,101. Although there were fewer attendees than in usual years, we needed to hire additional marquee space and outdoor toilet facilities in order to maintain adequate social distancing and avoid attendees entering the small site office. The total cost also includes £1,250 to replenish our stock of commemorative badges.
26. Funding was provided through a grant of £4,800 from City’s Cash. Unfortunately, although we asked other organisations to consider making a financial contribution, none did so this year. The remaining cost to the local risk budget is, therefore, £5,301. These figures do not include staff costs or use of in-house resources.

Proposals

27. 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.
28. 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 2022/23 is yet to receive final approval but is expected to remain at £4,800.
29. 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 Thames Fishery Research Experiment in 2022 will return to its full-scale format so that this 50th anniversary milestone can be properly recognised and celebrated.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

30. The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation. It is one of the oldest Citizen Science Projects and encourages young people to become involved in conservation of the River Thames.
31. The continued support of your Committee has demonstrated the City’s commitment to supporting communities.

Conclusions

32. The 2021 City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment was a successful event which was well supported and enjoyed by all who took part. Although we were unable to invite as many anglers and guests to attend as we usually would, it was very pleasing to see a return to the usual format while ensuring COVID-safety. The Experiment itself again provided valuable data and information to associated organisations and the recreational angling community.
33. It is hoped that, if approved by your Committee, there will be no restrictions on the arrangements for the 50th Experiment in 2022, and we will be able to invite all of the usual participants and guests to attend.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Summary of results
- Appendix B – Results data 2012-2021

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