

Committee(s): Epping Forest Consultative Group Epping Forest & Commons	Dated: 15/06/2022 11/07/ 2022
Subject: Countryside Stewardship 2023 Applications Proposals (SEF 17/22b)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	11, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Y – if capital grants are less than 100%
If so, how much?	£ - currently unknown
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N
Report of: Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director of Environment	EFCG - For Information
Report author: Sally Gadsdon, Environment Department	EF&CC – For Decision

Summary

This report is necessary to seek prior approval of new financial initiatives not currently included in the Epping Forest Local Risk budget. In addition to the existing DEFRA Countryside Stewardship (CS) award for Epping Forest worth £1.89m across 2020-29, three further applications for DEFRA's CS grant support are presented covering the remaining part of Epping Forest, Wanstead Park, and the Buffer Lands, largely centred around Copped Hall Park. This funding would secure income to support management of internationally and nationally important habitats, nationally important heritage features and enable improvements for visitor access in line with 'London's Great Forest a strategy and management plan for Epping Forest'. Comments on the proposals are sought from these Committees. The grant would provide a mixture of annual income to part fund habitat work and capital funding for one-off works and infrastructure. The 10-year income for habitat management contributions are estimated at: £600,000 for Epping Forest, £17,000 for Wanstead Park and £950,000 for Copped Hall. Additional capital funding would contribute to a significant proportion of the costs for one-off works and infrastructure, this would be the majority of funding for Wanstead Park. The applications would be submitted in spring 2023 for grant income between 2024 and 2033.

Committee approval is sought to prepare these applications. The proposals presented are a first version and would be refined through negotiation with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) feedback and stakeholder and public consultation. The scope of proposals include wood pasture restoration and veteran tree management, grassland and heathland management, rhododendron removal, extensive new visitor access features; management of heritage features at Wanstead Park and Ambresbury Banks; significant increase in management of habitats at Leyton Flats in line with its SAC Mitigation Plan. The final proposals would be presented to these committees before the application submission.

Recommendation(s)

Epping Forest Consultative Group are asked to:

- Note the report.
- Submit any comments on the proposals to sally.gadsdon@cityoflondon.gov.uk referencing map numbers in relation to specific proposals.

Members are asked to:

- Epping Forest Consultative Group – Note the report.
- Approve the preparation and consultation upon the three Countryside Stewardship applications for Epping Forest Part II, Wanstead Park and Epping Forest Buffer Land, subject to further final approval of the final applications.
- Submit any comments on the proposals to sally.gadsdon@cityoflondon.gov.uk referencing map numbers in relation to specific proposals.

Main Report

Background

1. The government's Countryside Stewardship (CS) land management grant provides partial funding for landowners to manage land for the environment and nature. This funding stream is already providing income to several Natural Environment division sites for habitat and feature management.
2. Around half of the Epping Forest area is already part of a CS grant agreement with 252 hectares of land management being funded to a value of £1.89 million over the 10 year life of the agreement.

Current Position

3. Three further CS applications are proposed: Wanstead Park; Buffer Lands; and a second application for the remainder of Epping Forest. Under the rules of the grant, separate applications are made for land with common rights, hence the separation of the Buffer Lands and Epping Forest applications. Wanstead Park has been deemed to be sufficiently 'stand-alone' to warrant a separate application to the rest of Epping Forest.
4. This report presents the initial proposals which could form the content of three applications and comments are invited on these proposals.
5. All potential proposals are presented here. The CS grant has defined eligibility criteria for funding and some of the proposals may not be eligible which may only be determined by working through details with Natural England in 2023, this

cannot be done sooner due to their processes. Other proposals may change over time. The final proposals would be presented to these Committees.

6. The funding is being sought for three types of work: habitat management, visitor access, and historic feature management.
7. Habitat management focusses on looking after the Forest's most important habitats and features that are designated as Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and/or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This is particularly important for those SSSI units in the application area of the Forest currently classed as Unfavourable No Change or Unfavourable Declining which are parts of High Beach, Hatch Forest & Plain, Blue House Grove and Reeds Forest, Highams Park & The Sale and Leyton Flats.
8. Managing visitor movements across the Forest and increasing access across the Buffer Lands will help to alleviate pressure on the Forest which aims to assist with the recovery of designated areas detrimentally affected by visitor pressure particularly across the SAC and SSSI designated areas. This is part of the forthcoming Sustainable Visitor Strategy.
9. The proposals for Leyton Flats have been taken from the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Mitigation Plan for this site (SEF 7/22). The aim is to fund some of the work through CS and for the remainder of the Plan to be funded through mitigation funding from local authorities.
10. It is proposed to fund a proportion of the work proposed for Wanstead Park (Wanstead Park: Conceptual Options Plan SERF 38/19b) through CS for elements where the grant is most suitable, and work can be delivered within the timescale of the CS grant. Other proposals for Wanstead Park would be funded through different channels. Members of the Wanstead Park Liaison Group have been involved in developing the proposals for Wanstead Park.
11. A significant proportion of the Copped Hall proposals are intended to be funded through CS and the existing Basic Payment Scheme, with the remainder funded through the Climate Action Strategy Carbon Removals project particularly for the reversion of the land currently in arable tenancy. These proposals are presented in more detail in the report SEF 18/22 Copped Hall Proposals, but they are summarised in this report to give the full context of the potential CS application.

Options

12. Agree to Officers preparing the CS applications which would be subject to final approval by the EF&CC. This would allow funding opportunities from CS to be fully assessed for these proposals and allow the EF&CC to decide whether to submit an application for funding. Some of the works have already been identified in site management plans. Preparing the application details, costings and undertaking consultation would require significant officer time to undertake. (Recommended)

13. Not agree to preparation of applications being undertaken by Officers on CS funding for these proposals. This would free up Officer time to allow work on other activities but would mean that a significant source of funding would not be available to progress well suited projects some of which have been identified in site management plans. (Not recommended)

Proposals

14. More details on the proposals are given in Appendix 1 and are shown on maps in Appendix 2. Please note the areas shown on Appendix 2 are currently approximate and will be mapped in more detail later in the year. The proposals presented are a first version and would be refined through feedback and stakeholder and public consultation.

15. The summaries of each proposed application are:

- a. Epping Forest
 - i. Ride (Path) management
 - ii. Grassland management
 - iii. Heathland management
 - iv. Pond and wetland management
 - v. Management of historic features
 - vi. Improving visitor access
 - vii. Veteran tree management
 - viii. Wood pasture management and restoration
 - ix. Support for cattle grazing
- b. Wanstead Park
 - i. Historic parkland feature management and restoration
 - ii. Improving visitor access
 - iii. Grassland management
- c. Buffer Lands
 - i. Copped Hall
 1. Historic parkland restoration
 2. Historic feature management
 3. Wood pasture creation
 4. Grassland creation
 5. Support for cattle grazing and associated infrastructure
 6. Improving visitor access
 - ii. Warlies Park
 1. New car park
 2. Improving visitor access
 - iii. Buffer Land-wide
 1. Improving visitor access

Improving Visitor Access

16. Across Epping Forest visitor access works would involve opening up rides or paths as part of habitat management. In addition, new infrastructure is proposed to be installed:
 - a. New surfaced paths at Highams Park, Wanstead Park and Leyton Flats
 - b. Interpretation – around 30 interpretation boards
 - c. Notice boards – around 100 entrance and information boards
 - d. Fingerposts – around 30
 - e. Waymarker small disks (roundels) – around 2000
 - f. To assist management of visitors, funding would be sought for around 20 additional bins and a large number of bollards for vehicle management.

17. Some of the proposed visitor management infrastructure is shown, but most of it will need to be mapped over the successive months and so is not shown on the maps.

18. At Wanstead Park there would be a small number of new interpretation boards linked to the capially funded heritage conservation work at the Amphitheatre, Great Mount and Ornamental Waters islands.

19. Across the Buffer Lands proposals for improvement for visitors include the removal of some unsuitable gate and access features and some new gates and a new car park is proposed in the south-eastern part of Warlies Park (see map number 2). If the car park is funded through CS then parking will not be charged in line with the requirements of the CS grant. This would increase the ability for visitors who do not live within walking distance of this location to access this area and the adjacent Gifford Wood. Other proposals are new interpretation boards and visitor orientation signage, new bins, removal of fences and stiles, with some replacement structures which would be of a better design. Habitat work to open up existing permissive routes and the creation of new permissive routes are also proposed.

Historic Feature Management

20. Historic feature management proposals cover both individual features (Purlieu Bank and Ambresbury Banks) and historic sites (Wanstead Park, Copped Hall). Trees are proposed to be removed from the Purlieu Bank, Ambresbury Banks and the Amphitheatre and Great Mount at Wanstead Park. Elements of historic parkland restoration are proposed at Wanstead Park and Copped Hall.

21. The delivery would be undertaken by contractors, staff and volunteers.

22. Comments on these proposals are sought. Comments are to be sent to sally.gadsdon@cityoflondon.gov.uk. Where relevant please quote the map numbers (Appendix 2) when referring to particular features.

23. Following these comments, the proposals would continue to be developed if application preparation is approved by the Epping Forest & Commons Committee.
- a. In early autumn updated proposals would be made available through a public consultation which would include a consultation with Commoners.
 - b. In early 2023 the final proposals brought back to this Committee and Consultative Group before the applications are submitted in April.
 - c. The application is processed by Natural England in discussion with Epping Forest officers over summer 2023 with its completion by August 2023. During this time Natural England may change the content of the application.
 - d. A report in September 2023 would be presented to the Epping Forest & Commons Committee to request permission to accept the final agreement offer.
24. The majority of the proposals for Forest land fall within the SSSI. This work and that of the existing CS grant are working towards achieving Natural England's Favourable or Unfavourable Recovering condition for the SSSI units in line with our responsibility for the care of the SSSI under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This will contribute to the government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

Key Data

25. In the area of Epping Forest proposed to be included in the CS application there are three SSSI units in Unfavourable No Change condition and one in Unfavourable Declining.
26. The Countryside Stewardship scheme is a valuable funding stream. Part of Epping Forest already receives around £150,000 in annual revenue funding in addition to over £200,000 of capital funding.
27. The current estimated income from the proposals above would be additional annual revenue of around £60,000 for Epping Forest, £1,700 for Wanstead Park and £95,000 for Buffer Lands. In addition, capital funding would provide significant proportion of costs with some works funded at a high percentage between 60-100%, most of the proposals for Wanstead Park would be capitally funded. Further work would be done to estimate the cost of capital works, the percentage funding is at the discretion of Natural England.
28. The applications would be made in April 2023 for the grants to start in January 2024 and would run for 10 years, finishing in 2033.
29. The existing Epping Forest CS grant will finish in 2029. The government's new Environmental Land Management grant schemes should provide a continuity of funding after the end of these CS grants.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

30. City of London Corporate Plan 2018-2023: (11) We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment; (12) Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained.
31. The proposed action supports the Natural Environment division'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.
32. The proposed action meets the Natural Environment division's objective of 'Open spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible'. It would also contribute to the Department's performance measures of the condition of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest, active ancient tree management and income generation.
33. The grant would deliver work to contribute to the government's 25 Year Environment Plan targets.

Financial implications

34. Under City of London Corporation Financial Regulations 2.11(d) it is necessary for the Chief Officer to seek prior approval of new financial initiatives not currently included in the Epping Forest Local Risk budget.
35. The CS grant would result in 10 years of guaranteed income for the continuation of the management of our internationally important habitats, nationally important heritage sites and improvements required for visitor access.
36. The capital works are funded at 60-100% of actual costs. During the application process the percentage funding would be made known and a decision would be taken whether to retain any elements funded under 100%.
37. Through the preparation of the application the eligibility criteria for the proposals above would be determined; some features may not be eligible for funding. This would affect what is included in the final application.
38. Future reports would give more accurate estimates of the expected income and any financial implications for the Epping Forest Local Risk budget.

Resource implications

39. The preparation of the applications would require significant amounts of staff time.
40. The management of any awarded grants and their delivery would be shared by the Conservation, Operations and Visitor Services teams at Epping Forest. Some of the delivery would also be undertaken by volunteer groups in liaison with Epping Forest officers. This would also require significant staff resource.

Legal implications

41. As required for the purposes of Countryside Stewardship Grant, the City, as Conservator of Epping Forest, has committed, by the terms of the Countryside Stewardship Agreement, to take all reasonable steps to continue correspondence with Commoners known to them about issues reasonably considered to affect them. Consultation should be carried out as considered necessary in order to comply with this binding commitment given to the Rural Payments Agency.

42. Historic England's consent is required for Ambresbury Banks and Purlieu Banks under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. The works at Wanstead Park are covered by the Parkland Plan for the Park and would contribute towards the aim of achieving the removal of the park from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register.

43. Any planning permission or other approvals required will need to be obtained before works commence

Risk implications

44. Prior to any decision to proceed with any final proposals for the visitor access elements of the proposed work an Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out, will be taken into account in developing final options and will be considered in deciding whether to proceed.

45. If weather conditions hamper progress with delivering grant obligations this could have an impact on the work pressures of the Epping Forest Operations Team.

Climate implications

46. The management of the habitats supported by the CS grant would increase the resilience of the habitats to environmental and biological changes brought about by climate change. The work complements the aims of the Climate Action Strategy of the City Corporation for both climate adaptation and biodiversity enhancement.

Security implications

47. None.

Charity implications.

48. 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.

49. The following topics were raised by the Epping Forest Consultative Group in June 2022 and answered by Epping Forest Officers:
 - a. From Epping Forest Riders' Association: A desire to retain the quiet character of Warlies Park in relation to access improvement proposals.

Answer: EFRA will be invited to input into the design of the access proposals.

- b. From George L: A concern about the proposed new car park at Warlies Park in terms of meeting sustainable transport. Answer: All access proposals will tie in with the forthcoming Sustainable Visitor Strategy which will help to draw visitor pressure from the Forest, which identify the need for additional car parks. The new Strategy will also include safe routes for horse riding and will tie in with the updated Forest Transport Plan.
- c. From the Highams Park Snedders: A proposal for the group to work on Hatch Plain to open it up again following infill with young trees. Answer: Epping Forest Officers will meet with the Snedders to look at the site.

Conclusion

50. Three Countryside Stewardship applications are proposed to be developed are in preparation for part of Epping Forest, Wanstead Park and the Buffer Lands. The scopes of the applications are presented here for comment and approval is sought to commit staff resource to preparing them. This grant would provide 10 years of funding to support the management of important habitats, heritage features and improvement of visitor access. The proposals presented are a first version and would be refined through feedback and stakeholder and public consultation. Revised final proposals would be brought back before the submission of the applications.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Countryside Stewardship Application Proposals
- Appendix 2 - Countryside Stewardship Application Proposals Maps – Areas shown are approximate

Background Papers

Wanstead Park: Conceptual Options Plan SEF 38/19b
Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Mitigation Plan (SEF 7/22)

Sally Gadsdon

Environmental Stewardship Officer, Epping Forest, Environment Department

E: sally.gadsdon@cityoflondon.gov.uk