

Committee(s)	Dated:
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	29 November 2022
Subject: 50 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

This report informs your Committee of the outcome of the 50th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 8 October 2022 along the foreshore of the River Thames, at Denton, Gravesend.

The report also sets out options for the 51st Experiment in 2023 for your consideration.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve the recommended option (a): to proceed with the 51st City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment in 2023 in its existing format and scale, accepting the higher cost to the local risk budget.
- Review and approve the grant from City's Cash to partially fund the 2023 Experiment.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment has been held annually since 1973. The Experiment takes the form of an angling competition, in which more than 80 anglers from eight adult teams and three youth teams take part.

2. The City of London agreed to fund the Experiment in 1972 following a proposal by the Chairman of the Port and City of London Health Committee to arrange an annual event in conjunction with the Thames Angling Preservation Society, with the objective being:

“to show that the Thames is becoming a cleaner and a more healthy river and to encourage the public, by publicity, into becoming more conscious of their responsibility in preventing the pollution of the environment in general, and of the Thames in particular.” (1972)

3. This objective continues, with the aim of the Experiment being to establish the environmental condition of the Thames through the variety, number and size of fish species caught. The scoring system rates 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 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.
5. The results provide valuable data and information to organisations such as the Environment Agency, the Thames Angling Preservation Society and members of the river community.
6. As one of the oldest ‘citizen science’ projects, the Experiment has the unique advantage of linking the river’s recreational angling community with sustainability and conservation. It is also an opportunity for the younger participants of the school and youth teams to learn from experienced anglers and be encouraged to develop a long-term interest in fishing and marine conservation.
7. 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.
8. With the support of your Committee, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to proceed with a safe and compliant event in 2020 and 2021 by reducing the format and number of participants. This enabled the continuation of the key element: the scientific research experiment, and the accumulation of a reliable historic data set.
9. 2022 saw a very welcome return to the full-scale format of the Experiment, enabling a fitting celebration of the 50th anniversary which recognised the contribution of all who have played a part over the years.

Current Position

10. On Saturday 8 October 2022, 61 adult anglers representing eight teams competed for the Lady Howard Trophy which was awarded to the team with the highest score. Additionally, twelve school-aged anglers, including a team from the City of London School for Girls, competed for the PLA-sponsored Schools' Trophy. All the competing teams are listed in the summary of results provided at Appendix A.
11. Prizes were also awarded for the largest/best fish and for 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.
12. 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.
13. The dry, warm and sunny weather conditions were most welcome by all and contributed to a successful and enjoyable day.

Principal VIPs / guests were:

- Sheriff Alderman Alistair King and Consort
- Sheriff Andrew Marsden and Consort
- Policy Chairman, Deputy Chris Hayward
- Sir David Howard
- Professor Martin Bigg, Thames Warden of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators

Other guests included:

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

Results

14. 879 fish of 9 species were caught this year: 789 more than the previous year's total of 90 fish. This year's catch saw the highest number of fish since 2005 and the most species since 2008.

2022 Results			
Species	Number Caught	Maximum Size	Minimum Size
Bass	6	48cm	9cm
Dab	1	17cm	-
Dogfish	4	56cm	50cm
Eel	10	50cm	32cm
Flounder	10	30cm	18cm
Plaice	1	20cm	-
Pouting	5	25cm	7cm
Sole	2	29cm	23cm
Whiting	840	36cm	19cm

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 reliable historical data set that has been accumulated over the past 50 years is highly valued.

The recreational angling community

17. The angling community's representative has commented as follows:
18. "In the previous two years, significant changes were made to the format of the Experiment in order to provide a low risk, Covid-compliant event. So it was with much delight that we were able to return to a full complement of teams and participants for the 50th anniversary.
19. Most satisfying was our ability to support three youth teams with coaches, teachers, bait, and equipment donated by volunteers from across the angling community. Remarkably, the young anglers returned a total of 94 fish, with one individual catching 29 whiting and scoring 145 points. This placed him in overall fifth place amongst the adult anglers.
20. This year was a near record year for fish numbers. Whiting dominated the species as expected for the time of year. However other species including dab, eel, bass, plaice and dogfish were observed.
21. With only one dogfish caught over the previous 49 years, it was a welcome surprise to record four, including a specimen of 56 centimetres. Dogfish are plentiful in the estuary but not so common in the middle reaches. This is further evidence of positive change in water quality within the river Thames.

22. The biodiversity award was won by an angler returning four species: bass, flounder, whiting and eel; a fair representation of the abundance of these species at this point in the river. Another positive sign of the recovery of eel was evidenced with ten specimens recorded.
23. Anglers again acknowledged the hard work of the organisers, volunteer coaches and stewards, but also the confidence shown by the sponsors in using angling techniques to demonstrate the improvements made in water quality over the last half century.”

Financial summary

24. The total cost of this year’s event was £15,010.
25. Funding was provided through a grant of £4,800 from City’s Cash. We also received financial contributions of £750 from the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers; £250 from the Port of London Authority; and £1,000 from the Thames Angling Preservation Society.
26. The remaining cost to the local risk budget was, therefore, £8,210.

Options

27. Over the past 50 years, the Thames Fishery Research Experiment has become a highly regarded event which brings together individuals and groups with an interest in marine conservation. It is one of the longest-running citizen science projects, producing a reliable historical scientific data set which is valued by stakeholders and has achieved its objective of demonstrating the improved cleanliness and health of the river Thames.
28. However, despite financial contributions from some of our partner organisations, the cost of the event to the local risk budget continues to increase. When deciding whether to approve the Experiment in 2023, your Committee is asked to consider whether the benefits of the event outweigh the rising costs, therefore a number of delivery options have been prepared:
 - a) Proceed with the 51st City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment in its existing format and scale. That is, with a full complement of anglers and guests, a full sit-down meal and presentation ceremony in a marquee for up to 150 people. This would involve accepting the higher cost to the local risk budget. **Recommended**
 - b) Proceed with a reduced scale 51st City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment, comprising the scientific research experiment only. This would be similar to the arrangements in 2020 whereby only anglers, stewards and a few key guests attend. Basic ‘takeaway’ catering would be provided, but no sit-down meal or presentation ceremony would take place. This option would reduce costs and have the advantage of being able to select angling

times based upon optimum tidal conditions. However, it would remove the 'community', collaborative element of the day and may reduce the likelihood of receiving financial contributions from partner organisations. **Not Recommended.**

- c) Do not continue to hold the City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment, leaving 2022's 50th anniversary event as the final occurrence. **Not Recommended.**

Proposals

29. Option a) is recommended as a way to proceed with the 51st Thames Fishery Research Experiment in 2023. This option does impact on the local risk budget, and the other options may need to be re-considered in future years.
30. 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. You are also required to review and approve the annual grant from City's Cash to deliver the Experiment. The amount of the proposed grant for the Fishing Experiment in 2023/24 is £4,800.
31. Should you choose to proceed with the 51st Experiment, 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.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

32. **Strategic implications** - The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment supports the aims and outcomes of the City's Corporate Plan 2018-23, particularly:
- 4a. *Bring individuals and communities together to share experiences and promote wellbeing, mutual respect and tolerance.*
 - 11a. *Provide a clean environment and drive down the negative effects of our own activities.*
 - 11c. *Provide environmental stewardship and advocacy, in use of resources, emissions, conservation, greening, biodiversity and access to nature.*
33. **Financial implications** – The Experiment is partly funded by a grant from City's Cash and from financial contributions made by partner organisations. The balance is paid from the local risk budget. Financial implications are balanced against the non-financial benefits when deciding whether to proceed with the 51st Experiment and the format it will take.
34. **Climate implications** - 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.

Conclusions

35. The 2022 50th anniversary City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment was a successful event which was well supported and enjoyed by all who took part. Following the two reduced-scale years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was very pleasing to see a return to the usual format and properly celebrate the 50th anniversary and recognise all who have contributed to its success over the years. The Experiment itself again provided valuable data and information to associated organisations and the recreational angling community.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Summary of results
- Appendix B – Results data 2013-2022

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