

**EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE**  
**Thursday, 13 July 2023**

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at  
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 13 July 2023 at  
11.00 am

**Present**

**Members:**

Benjamin Murphy (Chairman)  
Caroline Haines (Deputy Chairman)  
Alderman Vincent Keaveny, CBE  
Verderer Michael Chapman DL  
Verderer William Kennedy  
Verderer Paul Morris  
Verderer Nicholas Munday

**Officers:**

Emily Brennan	- Natural Environment Department
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Natural Environment Department
Ellen Fouweller	- Town Clerk's Department
Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Elisabeth Hannah	- Natural Environment Department
Joanne Hill	- Natural Environment Department
Jo Hurst	- Natural Environment Department
Richard Holt	- Town Clerk's Department
Jack Joslin	- Bridge House Estates
Simon Owen	- Chamberlain's Department
Julia Pridham	- Bridge House Estates
Geoff Sinclair	- Natural Environment Department
Tristan Vetta	- Natural Environment Department

1. **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies.

2. **MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** - That, the public and non-public summary of the previous minutes held on 15 June 2023 be approved as a correct record subject to the amendment of the title at item 16.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

#### 4.1 **Action Log**

**RESOLVED** – That, the town clerk update the actions as appropriate.

#### 5. **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & LEAD MEMBER PROPOSALS**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment, concerning Stakeholder Engagement & Lead Member Proposals.

The Chairman discussed the recent skills audit conducted earlier this year, emphasising the need to address issues that had arisen, especially during the pandemic. As a result a comprehensive list of recommendations has been generated to address concerns raised by consultative groups and others. It was noted that the recommendations outline in the report focus on improving meeting frequency, scheduling, and aligning internal reporting structures with Chamberlain and other stakeholders. The Chairman acknowledged the importance of maintaining a virtual meeting format to ensure participation while also exploring opportunities for in-person attendance. Additionally, Members were informed there is a commitment to reinvigorate local government liaison groups, consolidating their efforts as part of the broader governance review.

**RESOLVED** - That Members,

1. Approved the retention of Epping Forest & Commons Committee (EF&CC) meetings on a bimonthly basis, holding six meetings each year, four quarterly meetings for primarily Committee business with updates from control and logistics functions, and two additional meetings focused on strategy and policy development, potentially also aligning to site visits.
2. Endorsed the revision of Director and Assistant Director reporting to Members from narrative-based reporting to reporting focused on key performance indicators and project progress timetables which drive strategic priorities.
3. Endorsed the provision of early drafts of business requiring decision or policy proposals to EF&CC prior to being considered by consultative groups, to allow Members to set the framework for consultation and ensure responses are fully considered prior to decision making.
4. Approved the introduction of an Epping Forest bimonthly 'surgery' led by the Assistant Director (Superintendent) for Verderers to discuss issues raised by all members of the public.
5. Endorsed the retention of Epping Forest Local Authority Liaison Meetings, on a bi-annual basis, to allow local councillors to work together as one group to support each charity. These meetings will be Chaired by the Chairman or Deputy Chairman. Reflecting the dispersed character of The Commons arrangements will continue to embed Councillors into the relevant Charity Consultative Groups.

6. Approved the change to arrangements of the Epping Forest Consultative Group as outlined in the report.
7. Approved changing the arrangements of The Commons Consultative Group as outlined in the report.
8. Referred the consideration of an Annual Review Meeting, known under former Forest Law as a Regard, to the forthcoming Charity Review.
9. Explored the best platform to house action logs and other relevant information for each charity consultative group, which is accessible to external members.
10. Noted that the Epping Forest and Commons Committee Management Plan Sub-Committee and the Land Registration Working Group (LRWG) was abolished by the Court of Common Council in December 2021.
11. Noted that the Epping Forest Joint Consultative Committee was abolished by the Court of Common Council in December 2021. The Joint Agreement with the Field Studies Council will be amended to reflect this decision while scrutiny and budget setting of the licence will be added to the work of EF&CC.
12. Regularise community liaison for major project management around time limited 'Task and Finish Groups', predominantly led by Officers to ensure continuous communication and improved stakeholder partnership.
13. Continued with arrangements for the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (EFSAC) Mitigation Joint Steering Group meetings agreed by your Committee in November 2019.
14. Approved the creation of Lead Members, as proposed below aimed at helping spread the burden of office placed upon the Chairman amongst the wider committee, and also making best use of talent available on the Committee.

6. **EPPING FOREST AND THE COMMONS MEDIA FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Corporate Communications and External Affairs concerning a media forward plan.

The Chairman expressed gratitude for the efforts being made and acknowledged the importance of the work being undertaken by the media team. He recognised that, as the Chairman, he may have a more comprehensive view of these daily activities. However, he emphasised the value of creating a more organised framework to delineate roles and responsibilities, particularly in comparison to the activities of the local teams.

Officers noted the report outlined the upcoming activities of the media team for the next 12 months. Members were informed the report solely focuses on the media team's responsibilities. Officers said that there are local communications

offices responsible for various activities at the sites, including stakeholder communications and creating posters. It was noted that a comprehensive report that consolidates all these efforts would be presented at a later date.

A member inquired about the absence of any reference to additional funding or resources in the report. They sought clarification on how much of the proposed initiatives can be achieved using existing resources and whether there are plans to allocate specific funding as these campaigns progress. It was raised whether these initiatives are currently within the scope of the existing budget. The Chairman noted that the proposed initiatives were funded in the existing window.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members agree the contents of the report.

**7. REVENUE OUTTURN 2022/23 - EPPING FOREST AND COMMONS**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment comparing the revenue outturn for the services overseen by your Committee in 2022/23 with the final agreed budget for the year.

Members were informed that at Appendix D, which provides an overview of the Commons, that there was an overspending of £89,000 related to local risk which explained the overall expenditure of £97,000. It was noted that there were increases in transporter costs. The Chairman emphasised the importance of documenting the situation, as it was crucial to clarify to the resource allocation sub-committee that these are emergency works costs. There were three emergency works due to uncontrollable factors like tree diseases and broken equipment. These circumstances occurred toward the end of the year, necessitating the expenditure of funds.

**RESOLVED** – That Members, Note the report and the proposed carry forward of local risk and PIP underspending to 2023/2.

**8. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment providing the Committee with assurance that risk management procedures in place within the Environment Department are satisfactory and that they meet the requirements of the Corporate Risk Management Framework and the Charities Act 2011.

Officers explained that there was a commitment to provide summary risk registers every six months, along with more detailed ones for specific stakeholders. This marked the first occasion on which officers presented the summary registers. Officers highlighted a few Epping Forest risks due to exceptional circumstances. Currently, this pertains to tree failure risk and severe weather, influenced by the season and fire risk considerations. Additionally, officers included the Park Reservoirs project risk on the summary register because it is directly related to Epping Forest.

Regarding risks raised by Members, Officers said that the organisations risk structure includes corporate concerns related to staff recruitment and retention,

health and safety, operational property, and maintenance. It was noted these issues are addressed at a corporate level and are also reflected in the smaller departmental and individual risk registers. Members were informed that they are regularly reviewed and discussed by the Chief Officers Management Group and the Executive Leadership Board. Specific departmental matters are deliberated by the chief officers within these groups, and if necessary, they are escalated through this established process.

In relation to a question from the Chairman on reputational risk, officers noted numerous risks in the register incorporate reputational considerations. Members were informed that risks are categorised into distinct groups, however it should be emphasised that certain risks can straddle multiple categories. For instance, while a risk may primarily pertain to health and safety, it can concurrently carry substantial reputational consequences.

Regarding staff, officers noted both City Gardens and West Ham Park are adequately staffed. It was noted current vacancy rate is approximately three-quarters lower than initially projected. Furthermore, the number of staff members at risk is considerably lower than initial expectations.

**RESOLVED** – That Members, confirmed, on behalf of the City Corporation as Trustee, that the Summary Risk Registers appended to this report satisfactorily identify the key risks to each of the charities and that appropriate systems are in place to effectively identify and mitigate risks.

9. **OPEN SPACES BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23 - YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment concerning providing Members with a review of the delivery of the 2022/23 high-level Open Spaces Business Plan which was approved by the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee in December 2021.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members note the report.

10. **KENLEY REVIVAL PROJECT. A NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND (FORMERLY HLF) FUNDED PROJECT.**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Natural Environment concerning Kenley Revival Project. A National Lottery Heritage Fund (formerly HLF) funded project.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members noted the report.

11. **THE COMMONS - ASSISTANT DIRECTORS UPDATE APR-MAY 2023**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment summarising activities across The Commons between April 2023 and May 2023. Key data is presented in a dashboard format with further detail given in the main report.

Members were informed that there had been an unfortunate incident in early June involving a member of the public who was found deceased in a ditch

Burnham Beeches. There is no indication that the site was involved. Regarding the reptile service, officers noted while there are numerous figures presented, the key takeaway was that the efforts over the past decade to clear scrub regrowth and open up areas in partnership with Natural England had greatly benefited wildlife, particularly lizards. The restored habitat areas have shown an increase in the abundance of these species, indicating the success of the project.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members note the report.

**12. COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP 2023 APPLICATION FINAL DETAILS (SEF 14B/23)**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment concerning countryside stewardship 2023 application details.

**RESOLVED** - That Members,

1. Note the changes to the proposals.
2. Approved the proposals and related Countryside Stewardship final grant application as outlined in paragraph 32 (detailed in Appendix 1), subject to any changes resulting from engagement with government agencies.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director Environment to agree any further such changes to the proposals in this report in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of Epping Forest & Commons Committee.
4. Delegate authority to the Director of Environment to sign the grant award offer, agreement and associated paperwork.
5. Approved the increased use of contractors for delivering the existing Countryside Stewardship grant

**13. EPPING FOREST - ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S UPDATE APRIL - MAY 2023 (SEF 16/23)**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment to summarise Epping Forest's activities between April and May 2023.

Members noted that the debt reduction is commendable and expressed gratitude to the team for their efforts in achieving this.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members note the report.

**14. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

**15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

The Chairman raised the following points:

- Recent highlights include the successful opening of the natural play area in Wanstead Park, a well-received partnership project

- Upcoming visit dates include September 23rd, with a visit to Epping Forest, where the Chair of Policy and Resources will participate, offering a chance to address on-ground issues, celebrate achievements, and explore investment opportunities.
- Next week: Burnham Beaches visit and Dorneywood House lunch with a diverse audience, including local authorities and neighbours. Committee members are encouraged to attend, and we appreciate those who have confirmed attendance for what promises to be a rewarding day.

16. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**MOTION:** The following matters relate to business under the remit of the Court of Common Council acting for the City Corporation as charity Trustee, to which Part VA and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 public access to meetings provisions do not apply. The following items contain sensitive information which it is not in the best interests of the charity to consider in a public meeting (engaging similar considerations as under paragraphs 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act) and will be considered in non-public session.

17. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That, the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 15 June be agreed as a correct record.

18. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

18.1 **Action Log**

**RESOLVED** – That, the town clerk updated the actions as appropriate.

19. **LICENSING REQUEST**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment.

20. **REQUEST FOR THE PROVISION OF A DEED OF GRANT EASEMENT (SEP 19/23)**

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director.

21. **CORPORATE CHARITIES REVIEW SCOPING EXERCISE TO SUPPORT THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITIES REVIEW**

The Committee considered a joint report of Managing Director BHE & Natural Environment Director.

22. **HISTORICAL INCOME REPORT (2017/18-2024) FOR EPPING FOREST.**

The Committee received a report of the report of the Executive Director.

23. **HISTORICAL INCOME REPORT (2017/18-2024) FOR ASHTEAD COMMON**

The Committee received a report of the report of the Executive Director.

24. **HISTORICAL INCOME REPORT (2017/18-2024) FOR BURNHAM BEECHES**

The Committee received a report of the report of the Executive Director,

**25. HISTORICAL INCOME REPORT (2017/18-2024) FOR WEST WICKHAM AND COULSDON COMMON**

The Committee received a report of the report of the Executive Director,

**26. NON PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

**27. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**

There was no urgent business.

**The meeting ended at 1.20pm**

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Chairman

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