

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons Epping Forest Consultative Group	14/09/23 21/10/23
Subject: Epping Forest – Assistant Director’s Update June – July 2023 (SEF 20/23)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 5, 11 & 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	City’s Cash Local Risk
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	Y
Report of: Bob Roberts, Interim Executive Director Environment Department	For Information
Report author: Paul Thomson – Assistant Director (Superintendent) of Epping Forest	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarise Epping Forest’s activities between June and July 2023. The Assistant Directors report is presented in a revised format that retains essential information for Members, using a dashboard style to summarise key data and statistics. Further data streams will be added to subsequent reports.

Of particular note was the early summer dry spell with 24 campfires, 21 barbeques and 22 wildfires; progress with the implementation of the Forest #2 Countryside Stewardship Bid; the award of a design and build contract for Baldwins Pond; the selection of Wanstead Flats by the London Fire Brigade to launch a wildfire management investment initiative through the use of Smarthose technology and a delay to decision on the planning application for the expansion of agricultural roofing at the Great Gregories Conservation herd over-wintering site.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Epping Forest Local Risk Financial Summary – Appendix 1

1. Appendix 1 contains graphical representation of financial data to the end of July 2023 (period 0424). These figures relate to Epping Local Risk only and do not include central risk elements such as City Surveyors projects.
2. The first table in Appendix 1 gives actual expenditure to the end of July 2023 against whole year budget, subdivided by type and Department of Service (DOS), where CGC is Chingford Golf Club, CSS is Countryside Stewardship, WF is Wanstead Flats (football) W&W is Woodredon and Warlies and EF is all other expenditure/income at Epping Forest. This is further summarised graphically in Budget and Actuals by Type, across all these Departments of Service for this financial year.
3. Charged debt figures have been managed downward very significantly over the last twelve months with a reduction in debt by £45,355.19 to £27,937.48, subject to final payment allocations, since the last report. Property debts are largely wayleaves, and similar property transactions, administered through one system, while non-property debts are all other payable invoices raised by the Epping Forest office. Negative numbers are credit notes or payments received but not yet allocated against invoices.
4. The overall financial summary at Appendix 1 shows figures on 31st July. Staffing resource allocation following new Target Operating Model (TOM) structures is £760,000 greater than previous, which has now been allocated to local risk.
5. As recruitment is commencing in the second quarter of the financial year, staffing budgets are predicted to underspend in this financial year. A report of plans for further contractor procurement for car parking and ride surfacing works, development costs for Forest Transport Strategy #2, landscaping at Wellington Hill and significant investment in ULEZ complaint vehicles will be placed before your Committee in November. A full exercise in redistributing local risk budgets for this financial year and next will be completed in Revised Estimates in October 23.
6. All financial information shown in Appendix 2 is a subset of these Appendix 1 figures.

Epping Forest Key data – Appendix 2

7. **Car Parking Income (table 1)** – Monthly income for car parking in Financial Year 2023/24 is approximately the same as that received in the previous financial year.

8. **Licencing (table 2)** - Licencing continues to do well, particularly in Filming and Photography. This is an unpredictable income stream, but work continues to focus on growing this area where possible.
9. **Golf Income (table 3)** – Income has increased for June and July, helped by favourable weather conditions combined with good course presentation this year compared to the dry conditions last year. Yearly income totals show a healthy outturn against budget. Project work on holes 9, 15 & 16 to rebuild and level the teeing areas was complete and have been opened for visitors to use. Hole 3 was delayed due to staff resources and increased late spring cutting requirements. Work to complete this has been scheduled in for September. Further irrigation upgrades were carried out on holes 2 & 6 replacing old pop-up sprinklers with new improved pop-ups for better water efficiency.
10. **Energy Consumption (table 4)**- Additional investment in renewable energy through battery storage for our existing large solar arrays will allow the Charity to utilise power during peak periods, avoiding the loss of value by channelling excess power to the National Grid at an artificially low tariff. The battery storage system is onsite awaiting final connection with input needed from City Surveyors Department.
11. **Waste Disposal (table 5)** - The 1.95% rise in Landfill Tax Disposal charges to £98.60 per tonne since April 2022 continues to be reflected in the rise in disposal charges, alongside fluctuations in fly tipping experienced. These disposal costs include our own waste generated as well as that collected from litter, fly tip clearance or speciality waste. Cost for July were higher than usual due to a large fly tip at Sergeants Green costing £3,244.23
12. **Fly tips (table 6)** – General household waste continues to dominate the fly tips experienced across Epping Forest.
13. **Staff Vacancies (table 7)** - This pie chart has been updated to new structure post TOM, which has 97 posts, some of which are part-time. Recruitment is actively in process or due to start on 56 of these posts. None of these figures include externally funded posts (apprenticeships and external income-funded posts).
14. **Volunteering (table 8)** – Although variable, volunteer hours continue to average at around 1,000 hours per month level. There is often a lag in hours work and data recorded, so recent months will be updated in future reports.
15. **Current Lodge Occupancy** –Twelve lodges are currently empty, including some in poor condition, particularly 44 The Plain, The caddy House Flat and 1 & 2 Jubilee Retreat. Refurbishment works, including removal of known asbestos containing materials are being undertaken from local risk and Forest Fund, with proposals on future staff use to be determined by the Director. These figures do not include facilities at Field Studies Centre High Beach, or the Warren House. One additional Lodge, which was not a high priority for

staff occupation, has been let in this period.

16. **Visitor Centre Numbers (table 10)** - Visitor numbers mirrored previous year trends.
17. **Outstanding Tree Works** – Formal confirmation of funds carried forward from 2022/23 financial year is awaited, but work continues at full pace with all inhouse arborist teams now concentrating on tree safety works until the figures are once again manageable. In last report 1136 trees awaited works from inspections dated 2019-2022. That has reduced to 1004 in this update, but with a further 798 trees added from 2023 inspections, giving a total of 1802 hazardous trees requiring works.
18. **Grazing (table 12)** - Grazing days are slightly up compared to last year. Yardley / Yates meadow which have been grazed for two years successfully with >10 animals has had increased numbers this year (22 animals).
19. **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (table 13)** - Natural England's current assessment places 30 of the Forest's 38 SSSI compartments in 'Favourable' or 'Unfavourable Recovering' condition.
20. **Quality Awards** - Green Flag and Green Heritage Site awards last renewed 18 July 2023. The coveted Visit England 'Blue Badge' Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS) also renewed.
21. **Social Media** – Follower numbers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter all up slightly since last report.

Forest Services

22. The months of June and early July was dominated by Very High Fire Severity ratings, on a 5-point scale of Low to Exceptional. The Fire Brigades and Forest keepers attended 22 wildfires on Forest Land between 10 April and 20 July, with Keepers also attending 9 log fires, 24 campfires: 21 barbeques over a similar period. Fortunately, above average rainfall later in July, substantially reduced the wildfire risk. The Forest deployed new red High Fire Risk signs at prominent points across the Forest and worked with the Essex and London Fire Brigades to coordinate public safety messages during the High-Risk period.
23. The 10 July saw the launch of the London Fire Brigade's Smarthose™ investment initiative to improve the management of wildfires. Nicknamed the 'leaky hose', the porous hose is able simultaneously saturate grassland areas along the entire length of the hose. The Chairman joined Baroness Twycross, Deputy London Mayor for Fire and Resilience and Deputy Commissioner London Fire Brigade Dom Ellis for a demonstration of the new equipment at Wanstead Flats. Eleven Smarthoses will be sited across London closest to areas of wildfire risk.

24. Epping Forest also welcomed newly appointed Loughton-based Essex Police Inspector Leanne Archer for a tour of the Forest and the opportunity to discuss continued cooperation between the Police and Epping Forest Keepers and Enforcement Officers Forest on public safety matters.

Operations

25. Work has been principally focused on tree safety and vegetation against property responsibilities, alongside contracted work on the hazardous trees, The contracted work for this period has nearly been completed. Collection of higher risk OPM nests has begun, some nests are being inspected for the presence of parasitic flies. An in-house drive by survey of green zones has started. This is increasing the tree safety workload. 84 tasks have already been identified with 34 completed.

Learning

26. The learning team are leading a new 'Climate Action Pathways in Education' (CAPE) alliance, bringing together teachers and researchers to develop best practice in climate education. The alliance will work together to change today's education for tomorrow's climate, equipping people with the knowledge and skills to take climate action and protect the environment.

27. The learning programme has engaged 2,297 school students at Epping Forest (April – July 2023). The programme has reached schools from some of London's most deprived boroughs, including Hackney, Waltham Forest and Haringey. Schools took part in facilitated workshops that support the National Curriculum and boost fusion skills, wellbeing and connection to nature.

28. Epping Forest school visits:

	Number of Students	Borough / County
June:	142	Waltham Forest
	195	Haringey
	30	Camden
	16	Tower Hamlets
	84	Hackney
	240	Middlesex
	28	Newham
	120	Hertfordshire
	18	Redbridge
July:		
	206	Tower Hamlets
	61	Hertfordshire
	60	Westminster
	60	Redbridge
	90	Waltham Forest
	90	Haringey

Projects

29. **Countryside Stewardship Grant Scheme** - An application to the government's Countryside Stewardship (CS) grant scheme has been completed for the second half of the Forest, which follows on from the first CS 10-year agreement started in 2020. The works cover restoration of nationally important habitats, preservation of historic features and assisting visitors to navigate the Forest. Scheme proposals have been updated following public consultation and these changes were presented to July Epping Forest & Commons Committee, as a separate report. The final application will be completed by September 2023.
30. **Baldwins Pond Small Raised Reservoir Dam Repairs** – The Environment Department's District Surveyors Team is seeking approval for a Design and Build contract in order to progress plans for the repair of the leaking 6.4-metre-high dam, with works planned to commence in early Summer 2024.
31. **Great Gregories Farm – Roofing improvement and Barn Project** – Planning determination under EPF/0105/23 for the construction of a Hay Barn under permitted development rights has been agreed for the site on 14 February 2023. Planning application EPF/1054/23 for the erection of three agricultural buildings, roof canopy to existing building, water storage tank and retrospective consent for staff welfare cabin submitted on 9 May 2023 is yet to be determined.
32. **Climate Action Strategy – Carbon Recovery Project** - Consultants Arcadis have completed further analysis of the measures needed to maintain the current levels of carbon sequestration across NED sites. This data will be reported to the relevant Committee across the Autumn.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Epping Forest Local Risk Financial Summary
- Appendix 2 – Epping Forest Key Data
- Appendix 3 – Epping Forest Project Gantt chart

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