

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE
Thursday, 14 September 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 14 September
2023 at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Benjamin Murphy (Chairman)
Caroline Haines (Deputy Chairman)
Jaspreet Hodgson
Alderman Vincent Keaveny, CBE
Gregory Lawrence
Andrew McMurtrie (Ex-Officio Member)
Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Verderer William Kennedy
Verderer Paul Morris

Officers:

Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Environment Department
Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Joanne Hill	- Environment Department
Elisabeth Hannah	- Environment Department
Bob Roberts	- Environment Department
Blair Stringman	- Town Clerk's Department
Geoff Sinclair	- Environment Department
Tristan Vetta	- Environment Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Rt Hon. The Lord Mayor Nicholas Lyons and Nicholas Munday.

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That, the public and non-public summary of the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

4.1 Action Log

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk.

RESOLVED – That, the Town Clerk update the actions as appropriate.

5. **OPERATIONAL FINANCE PROGRESS REPORT (PERIOD 3 APRIL - JUNE) 2023/24 – EPPING FOREST AND COMMONS**

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain concerning an update on the operational finance position.

Officers introduced the report and highlighted to the Members a funding bid of £210,000 for contingencies to address dangerous trees in the forests would be discussed by the Finance Committee on 19 September. It was also noted that there had been an update to local risk budgets after the implementation of a new staffing structure, resulting in an increase of £793,000 in the committee's local risk budget.

In response to a question raised by a Member on underspend for climate action strategies, the Natural Environment Director noted that the budget is intended for a carbon removal project, a significant part of the climate action strategy. Members were informed that officers had received a final report from Arcadis, which explores opportunities for carbon storage on the Corporations open spaces. It was noted that the focus would be on protecting the existing carbon stored in these spaces since there are limited options for additional carbon storage due to nature conservation designations. The Director added that proposals involving tree planting, pond creation, and highway planting were being finalised and would be presented to the Resources Allocation Sub-Committee for approval for approximately £2.4 million in funding over the next three years to carry out this protection and enhancement work.

The Chairman noted the success related to the target operating model redesign noting the redesign has resulted in nearly £800,000 of additional investment in staffing for Epping Forest. Members were informed that this additional investment was expected to bring about positive changes in the Corporations ability to achieve its goals, especially regarding front-facing roles focused on protecting the forest.

RESOLVED – That, the report be noted.

6. **RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT**

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning the risk management update.

In response to a question raised by a Member it was noted by officers that an asset management review was in progress, which would provide a list of assets and their conditions. Members noted that several assets, including lodges and signage in the Commons and Epping Forest, were in need of maintenance and the review was seen as important to create a proper investment strategy to avoid large, infrequent expenditures.

A Member expressed concern about the risk register, specifically with regards to ancient monuments, as it focused on tree damage rather than broader issues

like cycling and public access causing harm. Officers acknowledged this and noted that the matter would be reviewed comprehensively to ensure it accurately reflects the most significant risks and aligns with the corporate risk register.

In relation to staffing, the Natural Environment Director reassured the committee about concerns regarding the number of keepers on permanent contracts. She mentioned that the department had been able to maintain operations with a larger number of casual staff during a recruitment freeze. It was noted that the plan was to move towards having 16 keepers and assisting keepers, along with two keeper team managers, and litter picking teams, which was a significant increase compared to the past 10 years.

In response to a question raised on the Target Operating Model, the Chairman suggested that issues discussed should be considered for the risk register if the process took place again. The Interim Executive Director, Environment confirmed that the risk was associated with the impact of the process and that lessons learned from it will be incorporated into the corporate risk assessment.

In response to a question raised regarding tree failure the Chairman requested that the Environment Department investigate the increase in the risk level associated with tree failure and how the difference is reflected in terms of health and safety concerns.

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

7. EPPING FOREST – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR’S UPDATE JUNE – JULY 2023 (SEF 20/23)

The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning the Assistant Director (Epping Forest) update.

A Member raised concerns about three car parks that were not being charged for parking and asked for an update. Officers noted the car parks had been targets of vandalism, and the team was working to ensure that when charging infrastructure was reinstated, this would not happen again. When asked about the timeline for this, the representative couldn't provide one and mentioned the need to consult with the investigations team. The committee requested that they return with more guidance on this matter as an action item.

A Member praised the learning team in Epping Forest, for their exceptional work with 2,297 students, including those with special needs. They highlighted the importance of this work for accessibility and inclusion. The Chairman endorsed the praise but raised concerns about the cost allocation charges for learning, suggesting that further examination might be needed, as it seemed that the more students participate, the more charges are incurred.

RESOLVED – That, the report be noted.

8. **A104 ROAD SAFETY SCHEME (SEF 22/23)**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning the A104 Road Safety Scheme.

A presentation was provided to the Committee by a representative of Essex County Council.

The Committee noted that the consultation process was crucial, as some people had expressed interest in suggesting changes to the scheme. It was noted that the consultation was expected to start at the end of the month with a preliminary design and will involve public engagement events, which could be both online and in person. The committee was encouraged to share their views during the consultation process, and a more detailed view would be provided once the final design is available for review.

Following discussion on the presentation, the Committee agreed that the following steps be taken:

- a) Express concerns to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation at Essex County Council about the lack of consultation regarding a scheme which is being proposed.
- b) Highlight the need to consider other users who may be affected by the scheme to avoid inadvertently creating additional road safety concerns which are contrary to the Epping Forest Transport Plan. Also recognise the potential damage which could be caused to Epping Forest by displacing non-motorised road users.
- c) Acknowledge that the surveys completed by Essex Highways may meet statutory requirements, but surveying for only 2 days does not adequately recognise the breadth of needs of all stakeholders who would be impacted by the proposed scheme (a number of whom have already contacted the Committee expressing concern).
- d) In return for the proposed damage to Epping Forest by the introduction of average speed cameras, propose that a revenue sharing agreement is created to support additional safety schemes outlined in the Epping Forest transport strategy.

RESOLVED – That, the report be noted.

9. **THE COMMONS – ASSISTANT DIRECTORS UPDATE JUN-JULY 2023**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning the Assistant Director (The Commons) update.

The Chairman reported on a visit to Burnham, which he found to be outstanding. He highlighted the importance of building relationships with local stakeholders in the area and initiating conversations regarding the local plan and local transport plan, which would have a lasting impact on Burnham beaches. The Chairman expressed appreciation for the volunteering efforts and commended the work done online to share activities in the Commons, hoping to expand this practice to other open spaces in the future.

RESOLVED – That, the report be noted.

10. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

There were no questions.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

11.1 Proposal to vary and extend the duration of Public Spaces Protection Orders at Burnham Beeches – Outcome of the public consultation process

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment concerning a proposal to vary and extend the duration of Public Spaces Protection Orders.

RESOLVED – That Court Members,

- a) Approve Option 1 – extend the effect of the existing PSPOs at Burnham Beeches for a further three years from 1st December 2023, with two minor modifications.
- b) Authorise the Comptroller and City Solicitor to make the necessary Orders.
- c) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Environment to authorise officers and agents of the City Corporation to issue Fixed Penalty Notices and otherwise act as ‘authorised persons’ in relation to the PSPOs at Burnham Beeches.
- d) Maintain the fixed penalty for breach of a PSPO at Burnham Beeches at £80 with a reduction to £50 if paid within 10 days.

- e) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Environment to update the Dog Management Strategy and the Enforcement Protocol for Burnham Beeches.

MATTERS ARISING

The Committee received a verbal update from the Natural Environment Director.

The following was noted by the Committee:

- Ongoing development of 2024-25 high-level business plan for Natural Environment Division
- Alignment of the plan with corporate priorities and consultations with committees in early November
- Work on Natural Environment Vision and Strategies, with workshops for members and staff to align with corporate objectives and aiming for a January launch
- Plans for a dinner event in 2024 to formally launch the natural environment vision and strategies

- Introduction of a natural capital audit to assess the value of ecosystem services
- Emphasis on conveying the value of open spaces and positive media coverage, including Green Flag Awards and innovative technology use in Epping Forest
- Ongoing work on the Natural Environment Charities Review, with more details and key deliverables to follow.

12. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED – That, 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.

13. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That, the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

14. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

14.1 **Action Tracker**

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk.

15. **EPPING FOREST LEASE RENEWAL AND LICENCE RENT REVIEW (SEF 25/23)**

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

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

There were no questions.

17. **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 1.30pm

Chairman

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