

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Epping Forest and Commons Epping Forest Consultative Group	23/11/23 28/02/24
<b>Subject:</b> Epping Forest – Assistant Director’s Update August – September 2023 (SEF 27/23)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<b>2, 5, 11 &amp; 12</b>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Bob Roberts, Interim Executive Director Environment Department	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Paul Thomson – Assistant Director (Superintendent) of Epping Forest	

### **Summary**

The purpose of this report is to summarise Epping Forest’s activities between August and September 2023.

Of particular note was the award of an additional £210,000 from the City of London Corporation to support urgent tree works; a notable increase in household waste fly tips to a total of 104 tips, averaging at 52 incidents a month compared to the previous 2023 average of 36 incidents each month; the delivery of another successful big walk led by the Epping Forest Heritage Trust; the creation of a new waymarked trail from Loughton Station to the Forest; the award of a modern Freedom of the City of a longstanding volunteer; and the granting of planning permission, subject to conditions, for the Great Gregories Agricultural Pollution Project.

### **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 September 2023 (period 0624). 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 September 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. Debt figures have gone up in this period, particularly due to short-term property remated debts corresponding with a new billing period. Longer term debts are due to a small number of difficult cases that are being formally dealt with. 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 30<sup>th</sup> September. 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 with investment in ride surfacing works, development costs for Forest Transport Strategy #2, landscaping at Wellington Hill and significant investment in ULEZ complaint vehicles planned.
6. The key data and statistics dashboard (previously Appendix 2) is under review following TOM restructure, vacancies and sickness absence of key staff.
7. **Car Parking Income**– Monthly income for car parking in Financial Year 2023/24 is approximately the same as that received in the previous financial year.
8. **Licencing** - 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** – Green fee income continues to be up on last year for August and September. The golf course remains number 1 ranked for online bookings within the county. Regular cutting requirements as well as additional

presentation work across the golf course was carried out to present the course to a high standard to host two semi-final events and the final of the Leslie Wood for Essex Golf Union for August. Green hollowing coring and verti-draining took place in September to remove thatch levels to help improve turf quality and drainage for winter months.

10. **Energy Consumption** 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 and is still awaiting final connection with input needed from City Surveyors Department.
11. **Fly tips**– 63 fly tips were recorded in August and 41 in September, this is a significant increase on the average of 36 recorded per month since January. General household waste continues to dominate the fly tips experienced across Epping Forest followed by builder's waste.
12. Epping Forest Enforcement Officers are investigating 20 Fly tip reports; 4 vandalism to car park events; 2 Damage to Forest reports and 3 matters relating to a dog attack; Parking (in Forest) and Anti-Social behaviour associated with a motorcycle. Of the 29 incidents 6 were subject to Conditional cautions issued for total of £920 and 3 warning letters, with 20 incidents remaining under investigation.
13. **Staff Vacancies**- Epping Forest Senior Management continue to prioritise recruitment to key roles with assistance from HR and other colleagues.
14. **Volunteering (table 8)** – Fifteen Corporate staff volunteers from Thames Water Company Volunteering cleared some of the lakeside vegetation and reopened views over the water at Alexandra Lake. The stalwart Forest Lodge Estate Litter picking volunteers organised an event at Leyton Flats. Litter picking volunteer Andy Crossman who has been volunteering for the Forest for 55 years was awarded the modern Freedom of the City at a ceremony at Guildhall on 1 September.
15. **Current Lodge Occupancy** –Thirteen 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. As part of a City of London Corporation-wide assessment, 22 properties have been locally identified as having as having the potential to have Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) elements. Further assessment work will be completed in November.

17. **Outstanding Tree Works** – Additional funds £210,000 to contribute to tree works have been approved and due to be applied to budgets. Work continues at full pace with all inhouse arborist teams now concentrating on tree safety works until the figures are once again manageable.
18. **Grazing (table 12)** - Planning permission has been granted by Epping Forest District Council for roofing and new livestock buildings at Great Gregories Yard, works are planned to start early next year.
19. Three visits were conducted with Land Use Consultancy, Members of Pasture For Life and Writtle College by the Grazing and Conservation team, the visits were to promote and educate on the undertaking and application of conservation and livestock work undertaken in the Forest.
20. **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.
21. **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.

### **Forest Services**

22. While the early summer month of July was dominated by Very High Fire Severity ratings, on a 5-point scale of Low to Exceptional. Periods of heavy rainfall in August and September reduced the incidents of Very High Severity index ratings. 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 red High Fire Risk signs at prominent points across the Forest were retained into September to help maintain public vigilance. The Charity continued to work with both Fire Brigades to coordinate public safety messages during the continuing High-Risk periods.
23. A successful 'Big Walk' event was organised by the Epping Forest Heritage Trust with support from the Forest Keeper and Visitor Centre teams on 17 September. A partnership between Epping Forest Heritage Trust, Loughton Town Council, Transport for London and the Epping Forest Charity, funded by City Enjoying Greenspaces funding launched orientation boards and waymarking linking Loughton Station with Epping Forest.

### **Operations**

24. Work has been principally focused on tree safety and vegetation against property responsibilities. The externally contracted work for the summer has been completed and further procurement is underway. An in-house drive-by survey of green zones is underway and is further increasing the tree safety

workload. Arborist supervisors are working on new and recurring subsidence issues as well as responding to claims regarding fallen trees.

## **Fleet**

25. Work continues to bring into Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) compliance with the removal of non-complaint diesel vehicles. Opportunities are also being taken to increase the efficiency of the fleet investing in a smaller mobile elevated work platform (MEWP) and the conversion of one of the arborist crew cabs with a dumper function that will remove woodchip from difficult to access Forest areas.

## **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 2,497 school students at Epping Forest (April – September 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. Children from Newham took part in summer holiday learning activities in Epping forest. The children were part of 'Ambition, Achieve, Aspire' - a charity working with Newham families in need. Learning activities promoted wellbeing and forest exploration. The Learning Team also hosted a staff away-day for the CoL DCCS team.

## **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 November 2023.
30. **Baldwins Pond Small Raised Reservoir Dam Repairs** – The Environment Department's District Surveyors Team has secured approval for a Design and Build contract in order to progress plans for the repair of the leaking 6.4-metre-high dam. Site meetings are underway 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 consent has now been provided for 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.
- 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 winter.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Epping Forest Local Risk Financial Summary

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