

**EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE**  
**Thursday, 23 November 2023**

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at  
Committee Room - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 23 November 2023  
at 11.00 am

**Present**

**Members:**

Jaspreet Hodgson  
Gregory Lawrence  
Andrew McMurtrie (Ex-Officio Member)  
Verderer Michael Chapman DL  
Verderer William Kennedy  
Verderer Paul Morris  
Verderer Nicholas Munday

**In Attendance:**

Ben Murphy (Chairman)  
Caroline Haines (Deputy Chairman)  
Deputy Philip Woodhouse

**Officers:**

Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Environment Department
Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Joanne Hill	- Environment Department
Jo Hurst	- Environment Department
Tim Munday	- Environment Department
Bob Roberts	- Environment Department
Blair Stringman	- Town Clerk's Department
Geoff Sinclair	- Environment Department
Paul Thomson	- Environment Department
Tristan Vetta	- Environment Department

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Alderman Vincent Keaveny.

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 14 September 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.

The Committee were informed that officers would be given access by the Town Clerk, via SharePoint, to ensure consistency for the action log.

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

#### 5. **EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk concerning its Terms of Reference.

Members discussed the frequency of committee meetings and the need for better coordination with consultative groups. The idea of more frequent or longer meetings was discussed, with mixed opinions from Members. The Superintendent was asked to explore the possibility of local meetings to address specific issues.

**RESOLVED** – That, the terms of reference of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee, be approved for submission to the Court of Common Council in April, and that any further changes required in the lead up to the Court's appointment of Committees be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman.

#### 6. **\*BUSINESS PLAN 2023/24 – PROGRESS REPORT (MID-YEAR, APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2023)**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning an update on progress against the Environment Department's high-level Business Plan 2023/24.

The Committee were provided with an update on a summary of progress for the first six months against work streams and performance measures. A Member inquired about the completion of the Countryside Stewardship application for Epping Forest, the Superintendent clarified that an extension had been granted, and the application was on track to be completed by the end of the month.

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

#### 7. **\*OPERATIONAL FINANCE PROGRESS REPORT (PERIOD 6 APRIL - SEPTEMBER) 2023/24 – EPPING FOREST AND COMMONS**

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain, concerning an update on the operational finance position as of period 6 (April – September) 2023/24.

Members were provided with a quarterly update on the Committee's local risk position, capital projects, debts, and charitable reserves. Members were informed of additional information on the deficit funding grant, noting how it is calculated based on the net cost for each charity. The Chairman stressed the need for a funding model aligned with the natural environment charities review and the asset review. He also expressed dissatisfaction over the slow progress

in understanding the organisation's assets and ownership structures. The Executive Director, Environment noted that progress was expected with a funding bid for the natural environment charities review in December. A Member raised concerns about income retention in local charities, Officers noted that specific funds are ring-fenced, but generic income may be swept into the central funds. The committee recognised the healthier financial position and the positive impact of recent investments and site visits.

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

**8. DEPARTMENTAL AND SERVICE COMMITTEE BUDGET ESTIMATES 2024/25**

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chamberlain and the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning approval of the revenue and capital budgets for the Epping Forest and Commons Committee for 2024/25, for subsequent submission to the Finance Committee.

Members were presented with Committee budget estimates for 2024/25 and the revenue and capital budget for 2024-25, which included a 3% uplift for inflation and funding for staff pay awards and additional staffing resources. It was noted that the overall committee budget for 2024-25 was 8.571 million, showing a net increase of 2.043 million. Members acknowledged the challenge of allocating funds strategically, expressing concern about the progress of the asset review, particularly understanding the maintenance costs of Epping Forest Charities and its relationship with buffer land.

**RESOLVED** – That,

- a) Members approve the Epping Forest proposed revenue budget for 2024/25 for submission to the Finance Committee.
- b) Common Council Members approve The Commons proposed revenue budget for 2024/25 for submission to the Finance Committee.
- c) Members, approve the Committee's capital and supplementary revenue projects budgets for 2024/25 for submission to the Finance Committee; and
- d) Agree that amendments for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 budgets arising from changes to recharges & support services or for any further implications arising from corporate contracts, energy price increases, changes to the Cyclical Works Programme (CWP) and capital charges during budget setting be delegated to the Chamberlain in consultation with the Interim Executive Director Environment.

**9. A104 ROAD SAFETY SCHEME (SEF 29/23)**

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning context and updates on proposals for a road safety scheme along the A104 between Buckhurst Hill and the Wake Arms Roundabout.

It was noted that the Committee had previously expressed concerns to Essex County Council about the need for proper consultation and had invited council

representatives to the Epping Forest Consultative Group. Officers provided an update, mentioning ongoing discussions with road safety teams and engineers. The committee was asked to support the draft proposals for the road safety scheme, as outlined in Appendix A, pending Essex Highways considering recent engagement comments and providing detailed drawings.

The committee clarified that the wording in Appendix A had not changed and questions were raised about the council's response to concerns and the impact on cycling lanes. Concerns were also expressed about the scheme's safety, especially for cyclists, pedestrians, and horse riders. Members discussed the need for Essex County Council to address these concerns and suggested rejecting the proposal or deferring it until further details were available.

The committee emphasised the importance of protecting forest verges and urged the council to consider safety measures that align with the committee's views. Officers proposed deferring the report to a later date for more detailed information. Members agreed that rejecting the current proposal did not imply a rejection of the idea of crossings but reflected concerns about the scheme presented.

**RESOLVED** – That Members, do not endorse the draft proposals contained in Appendix A of the report for a road safety scheme.

10. **NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT AT YARDLEY LANE, EPPING FOREST**

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning approval to submit an application for grant funding for, and subsequently deliver, a Natural Flood Management (NFM) project along a small section of a stream in the west of Epping Forest.

**RESOLVED** – That Members,

- a) Endorse the application for £35,000 - £50,000 funding from the Thames RFCC NFM Fund.
- b) Delegate authority to the Superintendent to enter into all necessary arrangements and agreements to secure the funding and implement the scheme, in consultation with the City Solicitor.

11. **\*ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S UPDATE AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 2023 (SEF 27/23)**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning a summary of Epping Forest's activities between August and September 2023.

Members expressed concerns with the state of the forest highlighting safety concerns, including poorly maintained car parks. The Superintendent acknowledged financial challenges and ongoing recruitment efforts to address staffing shortages. Concerns were also raised about the severity of fines for builders tipping waste, leading to a discussion on the limitations imposed by existing tariff schedules. Discussion by Members also touched on efforts to combat fly-tipping through partnerships with enforcement agencies. Members

proposed strategies such as informing magistrates of the financial costs incurred by the forest and launching a media campaign to raise awareness about the challenges faced by Epping Forest.

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

12. **REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EPPING FOREST CONSULTATIVE GROUP (SEF 23/23)**

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning a series of changes to the Terms of Reference are required to reflect recent administrative changes within the City of London.

A Member raised a point about allowing people to bring matters they wish to raise to the Consultative Group for discussion and escalation to the committee. While not explicitly adding it to the terms of reference, the suggestion was deemed feasible through administrative support. A Member suggested a more flexible approach to Consultative Group meetings, especially when issues arise, emphasising the need for the chairman and deputy chairman to attend. The Chairman acknowledged these concerns and highlighted the practical challenges of attendance due to multiple consultative groups.

**RESOLVED** – That Members, approve the adoption of revised Terms of Reference for the Epping Forest Consultative Group that reflect both the recommendations of the Lisvane Report and the Stakeholder Engagement report adopted by the Committee on 13 July 2023.

13. **PROPOSED INSTALLATION OF DEER 'EXCLOSURE' PLOTS (SEF 18/23)**

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning approval for the installation of thirty 'deer' enclosure plots' across Epping Forest and the Buffer Lands.

In response to a question raised by a Member, officers noted that enclosure plots would aid in monitoring and controlling cattle browsing, providing insights into the different types of browsing between deer and cattle. It was noted that the purpose of these plots was to gather data and understand deer habits better. Members expressed strong support for the initiative. Members were in favour of proceeding with the proposed installation of deer enclosure plots.

**RESOLVED** – That Members, approve the installation of thirty 'enclosure' plots at selected sites across Epping Forest and the Buffer land for £11,000 (+ £2,000 for interpretation panels) and annual maintenance costs of between £500-£1,000 per annum over 5 year.

14. **\*EPPING FOREST WILDFIRE PLAN REVIEW 2022 - 2023 (SEF 28/23)**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning updates regarding the review of actions being undertaken following Forest wildfires in the summers of 2022 and 2023.

The Superintendent briefly updated the committee, providing an overview of the ongoing survey work and the plan's expected completion next year. Members

noted that the mapping highlighted the concerning trend of wildfires moving further north into more protected areas of the forest. A Member suggested future engagement with local councils to align emergency plans. The Superintendent confirmed plans to engage with local authorities in the emergency planning process.

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

15. **\*SENIOR OFFICER RECRUITMENT**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning the Senior Officer Recruitment Procedure, a Chief Officer should report the resignation/ retirement of a senior officer.

Members noted that the current Superintendent would be retiring, and an interim replacement was being sought for continuity. Members were informed that the permanent position was actively being recruited, with the job description revised to highlight the leadership and management aspects, emphasising the uniqueness and importance of Epping Forest. Officers informed the Committee that the job advert was live on various platforms, and interviews for the interim role were being scheduled. The Natural Environment Director urged Members to promote the opportunity widely for a diverse range of applicants.

The Committee expressed gratitude to Paul Thompson for his 15 years of service and thanked Paul for his significant contributions and wished him well for the future.

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

16. **\*ASSISTANT DIRECTORS UPDATE AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2023**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning a summary of activities across The Commons between August and September 2023.

The Chairman highlighted the successful launch of a new augmented reality app in Burnham Beeches, praising the collaboration with the Children's Conservation Board. Members commended the initiative and suggested exploring the possibility of an independent website for the corporation. There was an expressed desire to extend similar initiatives to Epping Forest.

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

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

There was one question on matters relating to the work of the Committee:

- 1) A Member raised a question about the committee's utilisation of Gift Aid:
  - Concerns were raised about the inability to use Gift Aid for Epping Forest charity. Members expressed the need for simplicity in fundraising.

Officers noted that Gift Aid was under review, and the Committee would be updated on the findings.

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

There was no urgent business.

19. **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.

20. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That, the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

21. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

21.1 **Action Log**

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk.

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

22. **\*REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN**

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk concerning action taken by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair, in accordance with Standing Order Nos. 41(a) since the last meeting.

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

23. **RENEWABLE ENERGY STORAGE FACILITY (SEF 24/23)**

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

**RESOLVED** – That, in accordance with Standing Order Nos. 38(1) a vote on the recommendation(s) be recorded by the Town Clerk.

24. **\*LAND ACQUISITIONS (SEF 26/23)**

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

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

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

There were no questions.

**26. 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 12.47 pm**

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Chairman

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