

Resolution of Thanks to the Superintendent of Epping Forest

by Benjamin Murphy

To be presented on Thursday 25th January 2024

To the Epping Forest and Commons Committee of the City of London Corporation

Motion:-

“That the Members of this Committee take great pleasure in expressing to

Paul Thomson

their sincere gratitude and appreciation for the distinguished manner in which he has carried out the role of Superintendent of Epping Forest over the past 15 years.

Paul’s affection for Epping Forest began as a child, having been raised locally. He was also married to his wife Louise at High Beach Church, the spiritual heart of the ancient woodland. Paul has brought his wealth of lived experience and understanding, his encyclopaedic knowledge of land management and his desire to deliver public improvements to this role.

The Epping Forest Act of 1878 makes clear that the primary duty of the Superintendent is to protect the forest from the many threats that it faces. Early in his career, Paul skilfully led a land registration exercise that saw Epping Forest land holdings formally registered with the Land Registry Office for the first time. This reduced the threat of encroachment substantially. He also led a review of the estate’s property holdings, including 46 tenancies and 2,400 wayleaves, driving an income in charity profit from £675,000 to over £2 million, together with £4.6 million in property disposals for reinvestment purposes.

Paul has worked with conservation colleagues to scrutinise the 9 Local Planning Authorities which fall within the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation’s zone of influence. He has built consensus on the need to protect this internationally important asset, leading to a Mitigation Strategy with 7 local authorities.

Paul has led in the field of tackling environmental crime. Improved enforcement and information practice have led to best practices being adopted by the National Trust and New Forest.

Paul oversaw the successful submission and award of £6.8 million 'Branding Out' project to the Heritage Lottery Fund. This saw the restoration of the Butlers Retreat, Queen Elizabeth’s Hunting Lodge and Chingford Visitor Centre.

As the second largest provider of football pitches in Europe, sports provision has formed an important part of Paul’s duties. He was successful in obtaining £1.4 million in funding through the Football Foundation and London Marathon Grant Trust to modernize the Harrow Road Sports Pavilion while the Jubilee Retreat Clubhouse, home of running in Epping Forest, was revamped with £600,000 of funding from Sports England. The ongoing transformation of the City Corporation’s own 'Royal' Chingford Golf Club has led to much-improved facilities for golfers.

Paul has overseen the introduction of fenceless conservation grazing technology at Epping Forest, which has now been internationally adopted by other conservation and farming organisations. He has delivered management plans on wood pasture and heathland restoration, the expansion of conservation grazing and the successful control of invasive species, pests and diseases. These efforts have resulted in a Natural England score for the Site of Special Scientific Interest of 83.66% favourable/unfavourable recovering.

During Paul's tenure, conservation management plans for Wanstead Parklands and Copped Hall were completed, which included the identification of a rare Tudor Square Pond. Improved archiving and artefact management saw Epping Forest achieve accredited museum status.

Paul has used his role as Superintendent to promote the unique relationship between the City of London Corporation, the Sovereign (delegated to The Ranger) and Epping Forest through a wide and varied range of activities, events and projects. Operationally, Paul has supported nationally important events including the London 2012 Olympics, the celebration of the Commonwealth Canopy and Queen's Green Canopy and the Covid-19 pandemic emergency response.

Paul's caring nature, attention to detail and steadfast commitment to protecting Epping Forest will make him a very hard act to follow, but he leaves Epping Forest in better shape than that which he had inherited.

We thank him, most sincerely, for consistently going above and beyond the call of duty to do so and wish him and his family the very best in his retirement.