

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons Epping Forest Consultative Group	22/5/24 19/6/24
Subject: Epping Forest – Assistant Director’s Update (SEF 11/24)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	All 6 outcomes
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Bob Roberts, Interim Executive Director Environment Department	For Information
Report author: Jacqueline Eggleston – Superintendent/ Assistant Director of Epping Forest (Interim)	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarise Epping Forest’s progress against objectives since March 2024 along with updates of note.

Of particular note, a grant offer of £2.37m has been approved by DEFRA for the second Countryside Stewardship grant. Recruitment to new posts is progressing well and ground works have commenced at Great Gregories. A series of anti-social behaviour issues are being addressed through co-ordinated action by Epping Forest officers and supported by the police.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

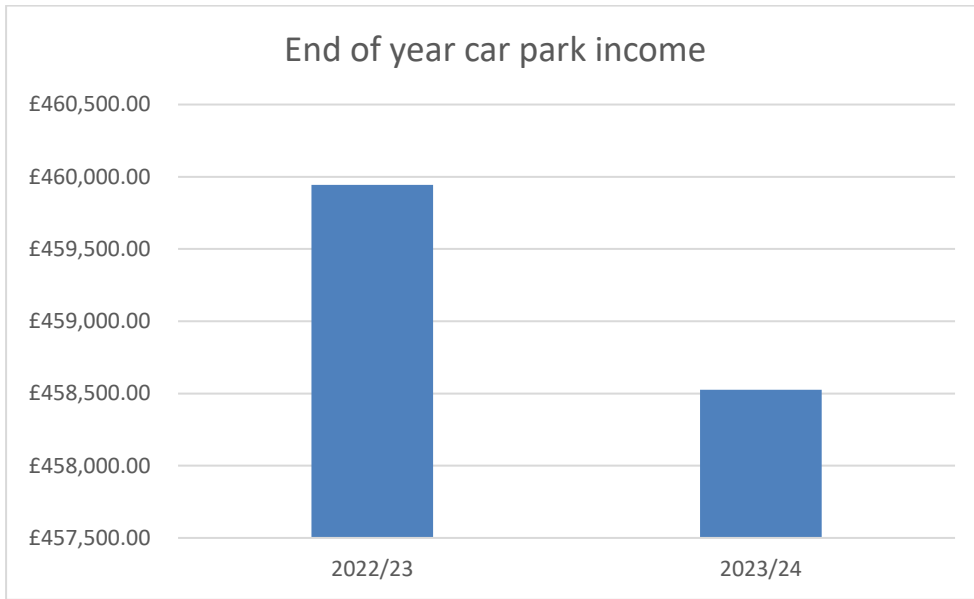
- Note the report.

Main Report

Key performance measures

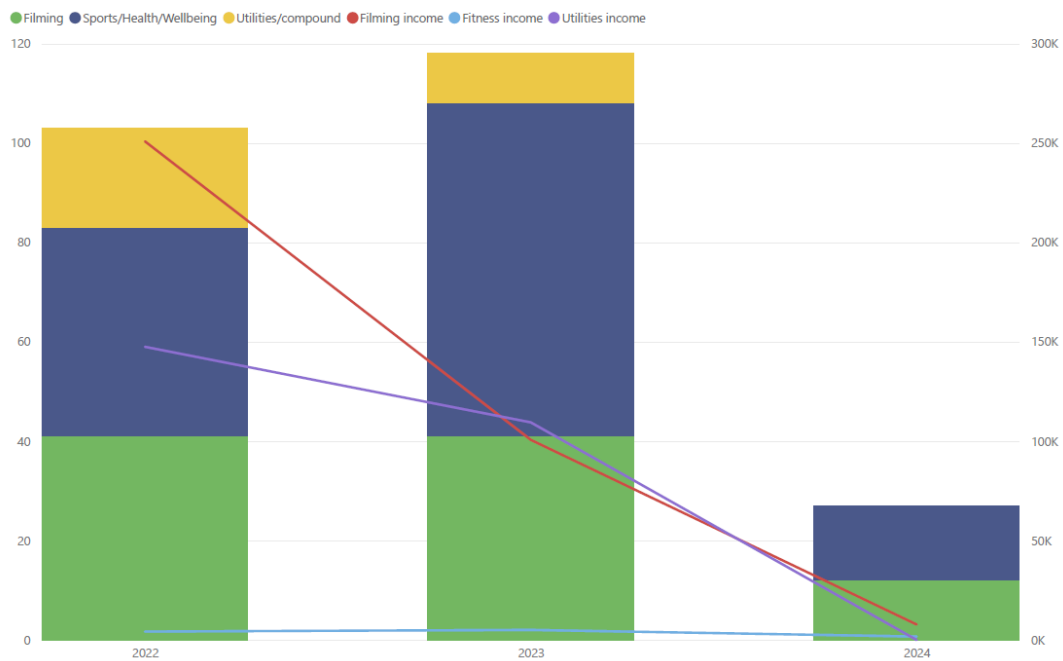
Car Parking Income

1. Monthly income for car parking in Financial Year 2023/24 is approximately the same as that received in the previous financial year.



Licencing

Licences and Income



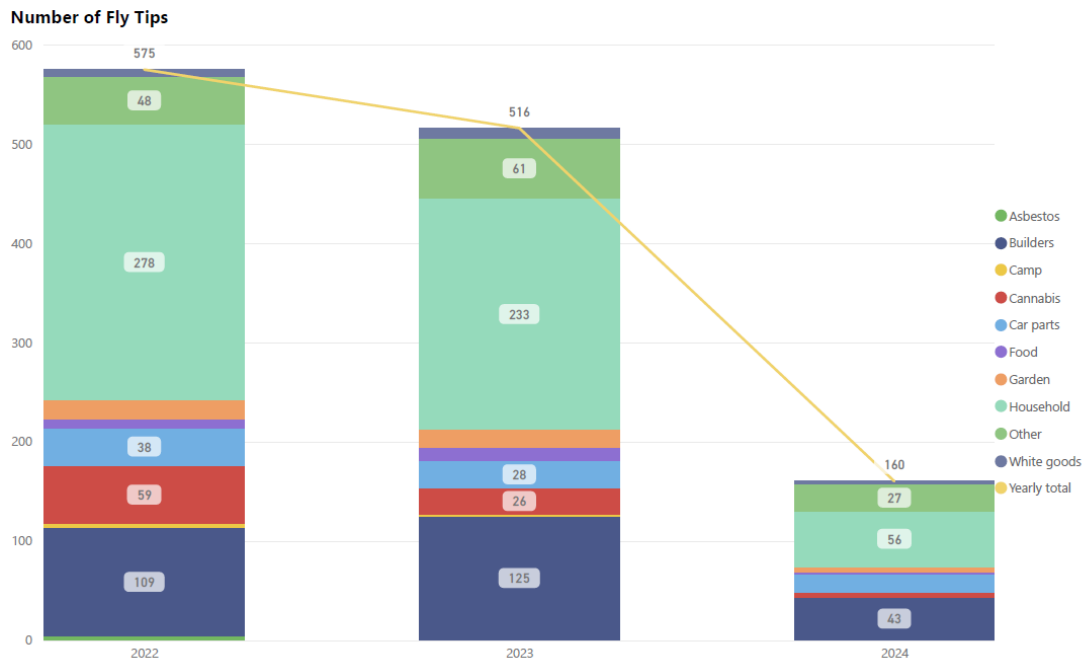
Golf

- Golf income rose for 2023/24 compared to the previous year, by £31,426.56 (6%) with total profit approximately £185,000. £55,000 was spent on a new green's mower and second irrigation tank, improving our machinery fleet and to allow staff to improve services delivered for visitors.



Fly tip

- General household waste continues to dominate the fly tips experienced across Epping Forest followed by builder's waste.



Waste Disposal costs

- Costs of disposal of litter and fly tips. All waste is recycled.

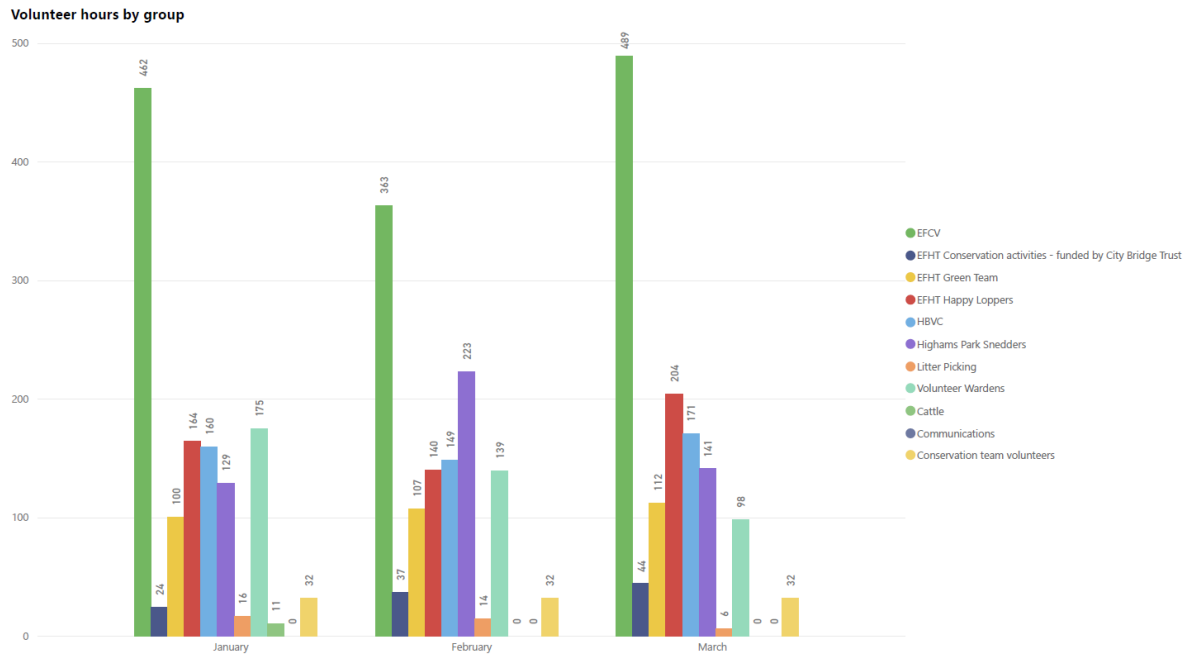


Enforcement

5. Epping Forest Enforcement Officers have investigated a total of 27 matters since 01 March 2024, comprising the following:
6. Four fly tips – three byelaw breaches, 13 criminal damage (in every case relating to skylark fencing on Wanstead Flats), seven anti-social behaviour (all matters relate to the use of quad / motorcycle) –0 dog related incidents and 0 poaching.
7. The team currently manage 25 on-going investigations. One matter resulted in a fixed penalty notice for a minor byelaw breach. Two fly tip matters have resulted in conditional cautions, one at £1000 (paid) and the other £300 (paid). One fly tip matter has been referred for prosecution / summons.

Volunteering

8. We continue to be supported by significant volunteering efforts. The table shows those organisations we collect numbers from but we recognise that considerable informal volunteering is undertaken throughout the Forest.



Updates

Outstanding Tree Works

9. A re-prioritisation exercise of tree work identified through existing and most recent surveys is taking place to help to streamline and consolidate the 'jobs'. Three new arborists have been appointed and a new team and task structure being implemented to tackle the backlog of works as rapidly and efficiently as possible.

Grazing & Grasslands

10. The 3 cows came off Wanstead Park after another successful period managing the acid grasslands brimming with ant hills. The Grazing and Landscape Manager gave a talk at Friends of Wanstead Park AGM on grazing in the Forest.
11. Two new young Longhorn Bulls were bought.
12. The Grazing and Landscape Manager hosted a visit from two operational representatives from Wimbledon Common looking at grazing and wood pasture management.
13. The Grazing and Landscape Manager met with the new owners of Harolds Park Farm, Nattergal, on site at their new acquisition. Also present were Jeremy Dagley (Essex Wildlife Trust) and Charlie Burrel (Knepp Estate).
14. A new mobile, hydraulic powered, tractor drawn Longhorn cattle crush has been delivered. This was designed and built over 6 months in collaboration with the Grazing Team and Morris Livestock. This new equipment will vastly improve our ability to work on our animals safely and quickly and is designed for horned animals to help them flow through the crush without having to move their head/horns to overcome obstacles.

15. The volunteer hedge layers have laid 185 meters of hedges at Great Gregories. The Grazing and Grassland team also took part in each workday to help transfer skills.
16. Solar panels are being explored for Great Gregories Yard, an initial expression of interest for grant funding from the Rural Payments Agency has been approved and funding options through CAS are being explored.
17. The Grassland Team spent 3 weeks stump grinding. This was to remove obstacles on their grass cutting work sites which hinder and often unbalance cutting equipment.

Recruitment

18. We have been pleased to welcome several new starters since your last report including:
 - Head of Conservation
 - Wildlife Management Officer
 - Health and Safety and Property officer
 - Arborist Manager
 - Business Administration Apprentice
 - Senior Grassland Conservation Officer
 - Engagement and Volunteering Officer
19. We will shortly be welcoming three new Arborists (pending final recruitment proves) due to start in May/June.
20. Interviews are imminent for the Conservation Team Leader, Waste and Recycling Manager, Digital Content Officer and Estates Manager.
21. The Forest Keeper Team Manager posts (x2) have been readvertised with keeper posts also shortly to be advertised.
22. Posts shortly to be advertised include Estate worker, Conservation Assistant.
23. At the time of writing this report vacancies stand at 34% but with plans in place to reduce this to a minimum of 26 % within the next month. The remainder of the posts will be more gradually filled including:
 - 3 are pending external funding sources/ project commencement
 - 3 apprentice positions pending managers in place and job descriptions
 - 4 pending new job descriptions

Incidents

24. **Quad / Motorcycle anti-social behaviour**—We are experiencing ongoing antisocial behaviour from quad bikes and motocross bikes riding in and around the Forest.

25. Joint working with Essex Police and Epping Forest District Council officers continues under the operation title 'Spring Action'. The current 7 investigations arise from 28 separate reported incidents notified to Epping Forest since 1 March.
26. On 14 April Epping Forest enforcement team led a high visibility joint working deployment. Police supported the operation and were able to deploy the National Police Air Service helicopter to a group sighting of males dressed in black, wearing balaclavas riding suspected electric motorcycles. They observed the group riding all the way via Waltham Abbey / Gunpowder Mill to an underground car park in Cheshunt. The police are making follow up enquiries.
27. Keepers and enforcement officers continue to attend all reported incidents and make proactive patrols at hotspots to deter the activity, gather intelligence and reassure visitors.

Skylark Fencing Wanstead Flats

28. Repeated vandalism of the fencing for the Skylarks on Wanstead Flats sadly continues to take place. However coordinated repairs and patrol efforts by Epping Forest officers and the Wren Group appears to have had some success in reducing the extent and frequency of the vandalism.
29. Feedback has been positive to our campaign highlighting the importance of the skylarks at Wanstead Flats and encouraging good behaviour from visitors. Additional signage has also been installed around the perimeter. A petition led by the Wren Group was signed by over 800 people to show support of our skylark conservation measures.
30. The Investigations Team has worked to identify and dissuade the individual(s) involved and continue to liaise with the National Wildlife Crime Unit and the Neighbourhood Policing Team on the matter.
31. During this period Wren Group members observed four territorial male skylarks present along with increased retention of feeding migrants, notably wheatears.

Bluebells in Chalet Wood

32. The three permanent bluebell interpretation signs and smaller signs with the edged paths are making a difference to visitor behaviour in Chalet Wood with considerably less trampling than in previous years. Whilst some visitors do ignore the signs, officer and volunteers from the Friends of Wanstead Park believe there is a general improvement and that the measures implemented in the last couple of years are working well.

Damage to the Hillforts

33. Cycling on the hillforts sadly continues, causing erosion to the banks. New signs have now been installed demarking the perimeter of Loughton hillfort much more clearly and indicating the area where cycling (and riding) is not permitted. Now that the signs are in place, keepers are undertaking regular

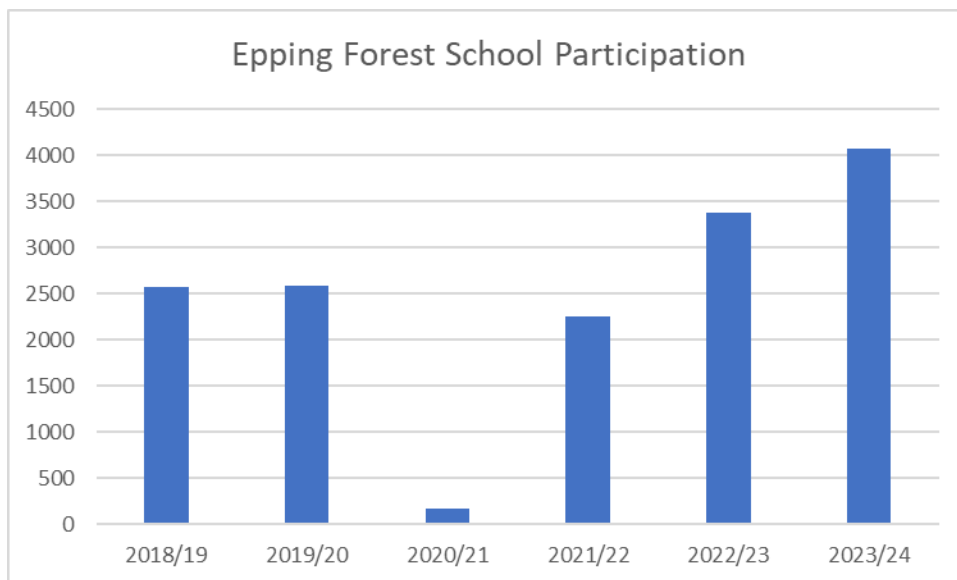
patrols and spot checks, with enforcement an option when education is not effective enough. The intention is that with regular patrols this behaviour will considerably lessen. We will be monitoring the impact of these measures and review after the summer.

- 34. Further measures and signage are planned for Ambresbury Banks and Loughton Brook.

Education

NE Learning Team

- 35. The Natural Environment Learning team has worked with 4065 school students this year (April 2023 – March 2024), with schools visiting Barn Hoppitt, Connaught Water and Wanstead Flats. School programme participation has been increasing annually following the pandemic, and now exceeds pre-pandemic levels:



- 36. In addition to the schools programme, the Natural Environment Learning Team delivered visits for asylum seekers, a pupil referral unit and Wanderers of Colour in March - April 2024.

Field Studies Centre High Beach (annual summary)

- 37. The City of London Corporation supported Field Studies Council (FSC) service engaged with over 200 different schools and 16,700 students at the Epping Forest Field Centre, consisting of primary, secondary, and A-Level students studying curriculum science and geography in our outdoor classrooms and learning locations throughout Epping Forest. Learner numbers are back in-line with pre pandemic levels; however, cost of living is impacting on customers.

38. They welcomed over 150 attendees to their Family Eco Adventures during the school holidays, where children could take part in nature-based games and activities and over 50 adults attended our Field Studies Council Biodiversity courses at Epping Forest.
39. Through the City of London Educational Trust grant funding, the FSC delivered Young-Naturalist courses to young people aged 11-16 in Wanstead Park, bringing those with an interest in ecology together. This grant also included Teacher Training delivered by an expert tutor, designed to introduce non-specialists to the ecology of Wanstead Park to increase teacher confidence in delivering curriculum ecology.
40. Through the Adventures Away from Home fund, the FSC reached out to those who are under-represented in the outdoor sector and welcomed 30 SEND young people at Epping Forest where they took part in outdoor nature-based games and activities to promote good mental health and local community.
41. The FSC continue to promote and participate in the Signs of Spring campaign in partnership with The Royal Society of Biology (as featured on The One Show in January 2024).
42. Summary statistics for FSC EF delivery:
 - Over 2180 primary school students in curriculum Science and Geography in our outdoor classrooms and learning locations throughout Epping Forest.
 - Over 12,700 secondary school students predominantly carrying out Geography GSCE Rivers fieldwork at Loughton and Debden Brook.
 - Over 1,700 A-level students studying Biology (Ecology and Ecosystems) at Rushey Plain and Paul's Nursery.

Projects

Wanstead Park Programme:

The Grotto

43. A restoration and maintenance plan to RIBA stage 3 has been commissioned and is currently underway focusing on the essential repairs needed to remove the Grotto from the Heritage at Risk Register and recommendations for desirable repairs and restoration works to the Grotto.
44. Consolidation of the landing stage. Phase one was completed in 2022. Following the structural investigations and trial pits, a variation was discovered in the construction materials of the Landing Stage. Therefore, an updated construction specification and listed building consent for the Landing Stage will be sought. The implementation of the landing stage phase two works will take place once the maintenance plan is completed and a new listed building consent is in place.

45. Funding for the restoration and maintenance plan was secured in November 2023; Funding of up to £150k for essential repairs to Grotto and completion of Landing Stage Phase Two was secured in March 2024. Both elements are funded from the CoL Cyclical Works Programme. There is also an available contribution of £14k by the Heritage of London Trust (HOLT) to the Landing Stage phase two.

46. The restoration and maintenance plan will include recommendations for desirable repairs and restoration works to the Grotto and would include recommendations on public access and visitor information. External sponsorship is required to deliver these elements and a sub-group of the project board has been created to investigate external funding opportunities.

Wanstead Park

The Temple

47. The Conservation Management Plan is now completed and presented to your committee separately for your approval.

Wanstead Park Dams

48. Procurement for the design of the Dam strengthening works will begin in May. Once detailed design is completed the works can be tendered. The design and tender process will take until 2025 with works expected to commence either just before or after bird nesting season (March or September).

River Roding Pump house

49. City Surveyors have appointed a consultant Spaflo who are designing and specifying the new pumphouse and filtration system that will be required to reinstate the up-cascade pumping system from the River Roding whilst it is in spate in winter months. The aim of this project is to help to reduce or eliminate the need for abstraction that currently takes place from the aquifer to the Heronry Pond.

Wanstead Flats

50. At the end of the football season a survey is taking place to help inform plans for future investment and organisation of football on Wanstead Flats. The proposals will come to a future committee.

Countryside Stewardship Grant Scheme

51. A grant offer of £2.37m has been approved by DEFRA for the second Countryside Stewardship grant. Tenders have been advertised to engage the first of the contracted works. Work to deliver the first Countryside Stewardship agreement will continue this year through a combination of in-house and contractor delivery.

Baldwins Pond Small Raised Reservoir Dam Repairs

52. The Environment Department's District Surveyors Team has appointed a contractor to progress plans for the repair of the leaking 6.4-metre-high dam. Due to further requirements surrounding planning permission for these works they are now expected to commence in Spring 2025.

Great Gregories Yard – Roofing improvement and Barn Project

53. A site initiation visit was carried out with all contractors. The ground works programme will last 7 weeks, starting with a new attenuation pond.

Climate Action Strategy – Carbon Removals Project

54. Interviews were held in April for a dedicated project manager and a project officer will be advertised in May. The spring and summer months will see some pre-works surveying to capture the baseline condition, and some of the works will start from September including the wildflower meadows at Copped Hall.

Events

Lend a Hand Day

55. The Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee accompanied by the Deputy Chair hosted a 'Lend a Hand Day' on 23 March. The aim was to recognise the contribution being made by Epping Forest volunteer groups and to help to raise interest in volunteering at Epping Forest through a volunteering event. Four practical volunteering activities were offered including:

- A conservation task to help protect ancient trees in Barn Hoppitt, Chingford, led by the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers
- A conservation task to clear undergrowth around ancient trees at Highams Park Lake, led by the Highams Park Snedders,
- Two guided tours of Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge, led by a Visitor Experience Assistant, with the purpose of recruiting new volunteers to assist us with opening this heritage building
- A mass litter pick, led by Epping Forest staff, across Chingford Plain.

56. This was followed by a reception at the Epping Forest Visitor Centre in Chingford with an informal style complimentary outdoor buffet with drinks, hot dog and woodfired pizza stall. This was a very successful networking opportunity as well as an opportunity to express to our existing volunteer groups how much we value them.

Muslim Hikers

57. The Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee welcomed 200 participants from Muslim Hikers to the Forest on Saturday 27 April as part of Epping Forest Heritage Trust's community engagement programme, now part-funded by the City Corporation Central Grants scheme. The 14-mile Northern Loop walk started and finished at Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge, and included talks about the ancient trees, signs of Spring in the Forest, the Deer Sanctuary and Ambresbury Banks. The walk was led and supported by a team of staff and volunteers from EFHT, with the additional support of two Forest keepers for the road crossings, and the London Borough of Newham who hosted lunch at Debden House campsite.

Future Events

58. On 11 May we are welcoming the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists to Epping Forest. Their visit will include a guide to the cattle grazing fenceless technology.

59. On 5 June the Institute of Chartered Foresters are visiting Epping Forest, with a programme of site visits to include understanding our hornbeam re-pollarding, cattle grazing using fenceless technology and challenges faced around tree diseases etc.

60. On 10 June the Forestry Commission are hosting an oak processionary moth awareness event, which is opening to anyone. Epping Forest staff are assisting with delivery of this with a site visit.

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