

<b>Committee(s):</b> Epping Forest and Commons – For Decision	<b>Dated:</b> 18/07/2024
<b>Subject:</b> Proposal for a Conference on the Biodiversity of Pollarded Trees.	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flourishing public spaces</li> <li>• Leading sustainable environment</li> </ul>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>£NA</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Emily Brennan, Natural Environment Director	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report authors:</b> Helen Read, Conservation Officer, Burnham Beeches Geoff Sinclair Assistant Director, The Commons	

### Summary

The land held by the City of London Corporation (“City Corporation”) as charity trustee at Burnham Beeches, Epping Forest and Ashted Common are amongst the most important veteran trees sites in Europe. In 1991 and 1993 the City Corporation hosted two conferences on veteran and pollarded trees which are still recognised as bringing national attention to the cultural and wildlife importance of veteran trees. The City Corporation continues to be seen as a world leader in the management of veteran and pollard trees.

This report describes a proposal for hosting a two-day conference in association with Ancient Tree Forum (ATF) on the biodiversity and conservation of veteran trees. The conference would be based on an established ATF business model for these events and would be low cost or revenue neutral but will require a significant amount of staff time in planning, preparing and presenting at the conference. It will however allow the City Corporation to share its considerable experience in the biodiversity and conservation of veteran trees as well as bringing together wider expertise in this area continuing the City Corporation’s long-standing role as a world leader in this area of biodiversity conservation.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Agree to officers from the Burnham Beeches and City Commons to work with the ATF to host a conference at Burnham Beeches on the biodiversity and conservation of veteran trees.

## Main Report

### Background

1. Since 1878 the City Corporation has been responsible for managing around 56,000 ancient trees. Ancient trees, with their associated distinctive decay and mycorrhizal fungi, saproxylic fauna and epiphytic fauna and flora are more abundant in Britain than elsewhere in Northern Europe. The wood-pasture habitats, in which these trees largely grow in the UK, are outstanding in the northern European context with the City Corporation's Burnham Beeches, Epping Forest and Ashted Common amongst the most important wood-pasture sites in Europe.
2. Veteran trees provide unique habitats for a wide range of rare species and the City Corporation's population of veteran trees is home to many species of international conservation importance. These species and the trees on which they grow are facing a diverse range of threats including the impact of climate change, new pests and diseases, fragmentation of habitat, increased nitrogen levels and other stresses.
3. Specialist City Corporation arboricultural and ecological staff have pioneered approaches to managing the conservation of ancient trees. In March 1991 and September 1993, the City Corporation hosted two national conferences on Pollard and Veteran Tree Management. These conferences are recognised as bringing to national attention the cultural and wildlife importance of veteran trees and, ultimately, gave rise to the Ancient Tree Forum, the national body dedicated to the long-term future of this unique element of our countryside. The City Corporation continues to be seen as a world leader in the management of veteran and pollard trees.
4. Our knowledge and understanding of the physiology, ecology and cultural importance of veteran trees has developed substantially over the last 30 years. During this period there has been a big expansion in veteran tree conservation across a widening number and range of organisations in the UK, across Europe and wider afield. The first conference featured keynote presentations on the biodiversity of pollarded trees by renowned experts such as Francis Rose on lichens and Peter Hammond on invertebrates. The biodiversity of pollarded trees has however not been thoroughly addressed since then despite important work having been undertaken in the UK, including the City Corporation's open spaces, and abroad. Conferences hosted by other organisations have focussed more on traditional/heritage aspects or detailed tree physiology and its implications for management.
5. To improve our understanding of the biodiversity needs of veteran trees and how best we can ensure their resilience in an era of rapid climate change, it is proposed that a conference of veteran tree experts and practitioners be held at Burnham Beeches.

## Current Position

6. The ATF organise an occasional program of national and International seminars and it is proposed that the City Corporation collaborates with the ATF on organising a seminar, based from Burnham Beeches, addressing the biodiversity of veteran and pollarded trees.
7. These ATF seminars are highly popular and well attended drawing people from across the UK and beyond. Outside of officer time they are organised on a financial cost neutral basis with attendee fees set to ensure costs are covered.

## Options

8. Option 1 That officers work with the ATF to host a conference at Burnham Beeches on the biodiversity and conservation of veteran trees. **This option is recommended**
9. Option 2 That officers do not progress proposals for a conference at Burnham Beeches on the biodiversity conservation needs of veteran trees **This option is not recommended**

## Proposals

10. It is proposed that in association with ATF a two-day conference be held. This would involve one day based at a local conference venue followed by a day at the City Corporation's Burnham Beeches National Nature reserve. As well as external presenters, COL staff would also be giving presentations on COL experience and leading workshops on COL practice across their sites.
11. An evening conference social event is also proposed. Based on former ATF events these are usually barbecues which could be based from the Burnham Beeches Café area. This would also allow the opportunity for networking and potentially a guest speaker to present.
12. The number of delegates is proposed to be between 100-150 with spaces reserved for City Corporation apprentices, staff, trade press and a number of students at discounted places.

## Key Data

### Corporate & Strategic Implications

#### Finance Implications

13. Overall, this is proposed to be a cost neutral project with attendee fees priced to match the financial costs. A start up budget to book venues and catering will be required from existing local risk resources however this will be relatively low. Promotion of the conference will be through well-established veteran tree social media networks and ATF e-newsletters and through their

local groups. These have been successfully used for similar events in the past.

14. The cost of producing an electronic conference proceedings would be priced into the overall conference attendance fee.

#### Resource Implications

15. Officer time for planning, organising, and presenting at the conference will be required. These would be integrated within the relevant officers annual Performance management process. The ATF have an established conference management process and would be responsible for the delegate booking and management process.
16. Planning and organising 10 officer days over 18 months. Four COL staff presenting 12 days (time for preparing, take down and presenting), Conference logistics over the two days in 2025 (15-man days). In addition, we anticipate significant volunteer support.
17. There will be a need for some (minor) funding for producing materials relating to the presentations (especially if outside) plus gazebo/marquees which may be able to borrowed from he Natural Environment Division.

#### Strategic Implications

18. Theme 2 of the Natural Environment Division strategy is 'to increase the resilience of our open spaces within a wider interconnected natural landscape'. The conference will help to improve knowledge and understanding on the managing for the resilience of the City Corporation's 56,000 veteran trees.

#### Equalities Implications

19. Supported places will be made available for students and City Corporation's arborist and countryside management apprentices.
20. Accessibility assessments will be required for the both the conference venue and site visit.

#### Climate Implications

21. This project will contribute to our knowledge of improving the resilience of veteran tree biodiversity to climate change.

#### Legal Implications

22. None

## Risk Implications

23. The conference will need to have a risk management process put in place which will be developed in consultation with City Corporation's Health and Safety team.

## Charity implications

24. Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common is a registered charity (number 232987). Charity Law obliges Members to ensure that the decisions they take in relation to the Charity must be taken in the best interests of the Charity.

## Security implications

25. None

## Conclusion

26. Continuing the established role of the City Corporation's role as a world leader in conservation of veteran and pollarded trees conservation a two-day conference on the biodiversity of veteran trees is proposed.
27. The conference would be based on an established low cost/revenue neutral business model of the ATF with which it is proposed the conference would be run. It will require significant amount of staff time over the next 18 months which has been estimated at 37 officer days.

## Appendices

None

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