

<b>Committees:</b> Epping Forest and Commons	<b>Dated:</b> 28/11/2024
<b>Subject:</b> Assistant Director Epping Forest Update Report July – Sept 2024 (SEF 18/24)	<b>Public</b>
<b>This proposal</b> a) <b>delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes</b> Diverse Engaged Communities Leading Sustainable Environment Vibrant Thriving Destination Flourishing Public Spaces b) <b>provides statutory duties</b> c) <b>provides business enabling functions</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> Katie Stewart, Executive Director Environment	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Jacqueline Eggleston, Assistant Director (Superintendent) of Epping Forest, Natural Environment	

### Summary

The purpose of this report is to present key information on business activity aligned to objectives for Epping Forest for the period July 2024 -September 2024. This is a summary report and more detail is provided in the appendices/

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Current Position

This report provides summary information for the second quarter for 2024/25 and should be read in conjunction with the appendices and with separate reports on financial activity, risk management and high-level business planning to provide an overview of progress made against Corporate and Natural Environment objectives.

## **Summary of progress against Business Plan objectives for the period July-September 2024**

### **1. Environment / Conservation / Heritage (NEB Nature Conservation and Resilience Strategy)**

1.1 Major habitat restoration works commenced under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

1.2 An ecological consultant was commissioned to undertake a habitat baseline survey using UKHab and MoRPH of land at Copped Hall to complete a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment for the nature restoration proposals.

1.3 The arable reversion project began in September at Copped Hall with eight fields re-seeded with a grass and wildflower mix.

1.4 It has not been possible to sell weaned youngstock cattle to the usual supplier due to Bluetongue restrictions in place in Essex. APHA conducted surveillance testing on 35 animals, all tested negative. 25 cattle will need to be housed in the buildings at Great Gregories until restrictions have been lifted.

### **2. Education / Training (NEB Culture, Heritage and Learning Strategy)**

2.1 862 school children participated in Learning Team facilitated workshops in July and September, with a total of 2602 participating so far in this financial year. The workshops facilitate a connection to nature as a foundation for pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours.

2.2 The Learning Team supported Epping Forest's Skylark event at Wanstead Flats offering a range of activities, including a nest hide-and-seek game to demonstrate the importance of long grass as a habitat for skylarks.

### **3. Recreation (NEB Access and Recreation Strategy)**

3.1 Funding of £48,745 was awarded from the Rural England Prosperity Fund via EFDC for a sculpture trail based on the Brambly Hedge books.

### **4. Amateur Sport (NEB Access and Recreation Strategy)**

4.1 Chingford Golf Course continues to be ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the county with our booking agent GolfNow, out of 53 courses.

4.2 The golf course welcomed over 10,000 visitors in July, August & September.

4.3 The new football season at Wanstead Flats Playing fields started in September, bookings remain the same as previous season.

4.3 Signage for new pitch configurations was installed at both sites making it easier for visitors to locate allocated pitches each week. Pavilions were deep cleaned and toilets repainted at Aldersbrook Road. The fence located at

Aldersbrook Road was repainted. Goal posts were taken down and repainted ready for new season.

## **5. Income Generation**

5.1 A second Countryside Stewardship grant was secured from Defra. The £2.35m funding over 10 years grant builds on the first CS grant of £2.027m, thus providing £4.377m in total.

## **6. Enforcement.**

6.1 Enforcement Officers investigated a total of 30 new matters and continue to progress to a positive outcome. Two on-going ASB issues in this period, comprising the following types; 27 fly tips, 2 byelaw breaches and 1 anti-social behaviour.

6.2. Nine separate matters have resulted in conditional cautions, totalling £1,400. Four completed fly tip matters have been referred or authorised for prosecution / summons.

6.3 Fly tip reports have seen an increase in 2024. The enforcement team seek to tackle this increase with prevention activity focusing on data driven hotspots, continued education and media activity to raise awareness and improved joint working with stakeholders, particularly Epping Forest District Council. A number of design-out solutions have been placed at hotspots to change the physical characteristics to improve prevention making the location a less desirable offending spot. (Hangman's Hill & Woodredon Farm Lane).

6.4 Better joint working culminated with a joint bid into the Essex Safer Streets funding (Essex Police and Fire Commissioners) for improved mobile covert cameras and an installation of static CCTV and ANPR in the Pillow Mounds, High Beach. This offered overt prevention features, improved investigative opportunities and a fast, flexible deployment to tackle emerging offending trends.

6.5 Quad / Motorcycle ASB in High Beach. A total of 14 reports from Forest Users and several sightings by staff continued during the period. However, there have been no reports since 29 August 2024. This coincided with the multiple joint working 'surge' deployments with Essex police, including the deployment of quad bikes, that contributed to a downward trend in the number of reported matters. A pedestrian only gate had been installed within Copped Hall, near to one of the gates identified as being used by electric powered motorcycles to access the wider Forest. As there have been no new complaints or staff sightings for over a month the dedicated EF / Police deployment has been paused whilst the data is monitored.

6.5 Rough sleeper / drug use encampment monitoring at Wanstead Flats has continued twice weekly with joint working proactive patrols undertaken with Newham & Redbridge neighbourhood teams and police officers from the Metropolitan Police, has started to see tangible results. The area, opposite the City of London Cemetery and Crematorium beside Aldersbrook Road, was patrolled by uniformed and plain clothes officers with Forest Keepers supporting the activity. Individuals present & suspected of drug and alcohol abuse were

served ASB notices and subjected to name checks and searching where the grounds to do so existed.

## **7. People Management**

7.1 Recruitment: There have been seven new starters during this reporting period: Estates Team Manager, Estates Team Supervisor, Keeper Team Manager, Waste and Recycling Manager, two Arborists and a Digital Content Officer.

7.2 TOM2 and Staff Survey feedback: A commitment was made to Members to share feedback about key issues and areas of concern raised via the last Staff Survey and via the TOM2 workshops held in summer 2024. The feedback was summarised below and was used to shape the Action Plan attached (Appendix 2). These actions will help address the main concerns raised by staff and a progress report will be provided at regular intervals. There were no specific suggestions for structural changes via the TOM2 feedback or staff survey, however areas of under-resourcing are being identified and addressed.

- 7.2.1 Leadership & communication: Poor communication; lack of proper consultation; lack of transparency; loss of trust in leadership.
- 7.2.2 Workforce & wellbeing: Understaffed teams; overstretched staff; outdated or no job descriptions; downgrading of some roles which resulted in low morale; stress; sickness absence issues; staff felt undervalued.
- 7.2.3 Process & operational efficiency: Need for a clear business planning process; TOM2 roles not clearly defined or understood; over-reliance on casual staff; lack of up-to-date policies and procedures.
- 7.2.4 Financial management: Financial challenges and unrealistic targets have strained resources; concerns about high hospitality costs; poor communications on whether 12% savings were achieved; ineffective financial management and processes.
- 7.2.5 Training & development: Challenge to recruit and retain good staff due to below-industry wages; staff not given adequate training (inc. casuals).

## **Conclusion**

Considerable progress against Epping Forest management plan objectives and key strategies have been delivered during the reporting period.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Progress against key objectives / actions (categorised by Natural Environment Strategy).
- Appendix 2. Staff Survey Action Plan

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