

Assistant Director's Update

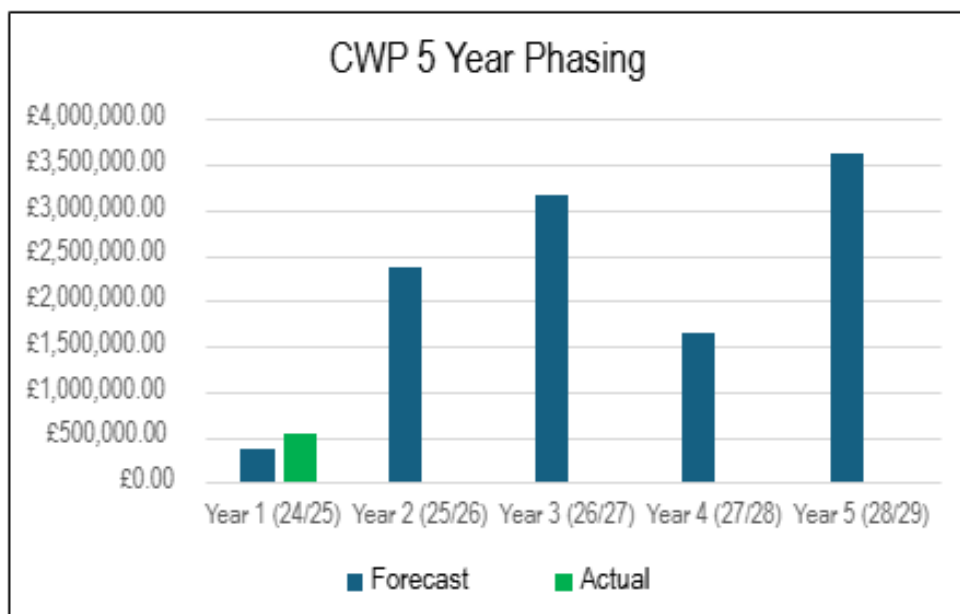
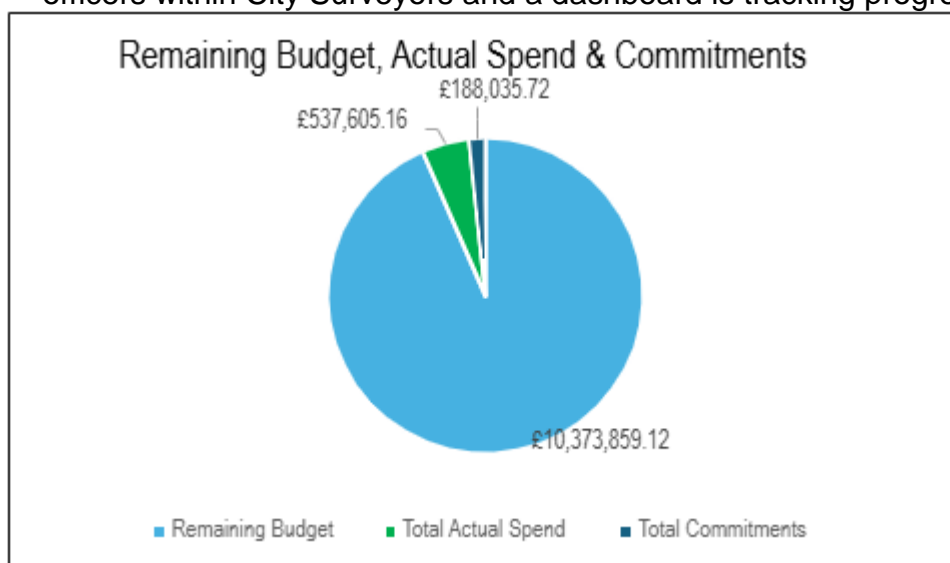
Appendix A

Updates on actions taken to deliver Epping Forest charity objectives and Natural Environment strategies for the period January – April 2025.

1. A Welcoming Destination for all (Access and Recreation)

Estate Improvements

- 1.1 Progress has been made against the Corporate Cyclical Works Programme including a new fence at the Visitor Centre and the car park repairs have been tendered. A new project management board is now in place, led by officers within City Surveyors and a dashboard is tracking progress:



- 1.2 Within the Warren yard a new wash bay extension has been created to improve facilities for tractor wash down. Multiple teams have been working together to clear out the yard and the paddock has been levelled to create additional storage and access for recycling. The sawmill, barns and several of the units have now been cleaned out and repurposed for improved storage and workshop facilities to enable more work to be carried out in house including carpentry and welding.
- 1.3 A path regrading machine (power rake) has been purchased and is making significant improvements to the surfaced path network and has contributed to repairing two car parks- see photo of Broadstrood car park before and after. Work has also been completed by the City Surveyors team to improve Car Park entrances at Rushey Plain and Claypit Hill.



- 1.4 The easy access path at Connaught Waters has been repaired.
- 1.5 A long-standing leak at Johnstons Pond has been repaired to prevent water loss and road safety concerns. The bank has been reinforced and overseeded.

2. Waste and Cleansing

- 2.1 The new dedicated management arrangements for waste and cleansing are reaping dividends with new contracts for collection and storage and separation of waste on site meaning that we are in receipt of rebates and income in some cases rather than payments for waste collection (such as metals).
- 2.2 The waste team are working closely with the Volunteer Officer and now have 30-40 volunteers working every second Wednesday alongside the team to litter pick.

3. Keeper and Enforcement

- 3.1 After a costly and complicated exercise to repair the antennae, the radios are back in use, improving communication and safety.
- 3.2 Keepers, enforcement and cleansing teams cleared large scale rough sleeper camps once the weather warmed. Rough sleepers are referred to Street Link and local authority teams.
- 3.3 A trial of ANPR systems has been in place across four Forest car parks. At halfway through the pilot period there has been a 40% increase in income with compliance now nearer the national average of 99%. An additional trial of leaving the gates in these car parks unlocked overnight has not resulted in an increase in anti-social behaviour.
- 3.4 Operation Nexus - keepers, cleansing and enforcement teams, have worked alongside LB Newham and the Met police to target drug taking, prostitution and associated anti-social behaviour at Manor Park (Wanstead Flats). Local politicians joined a multi-agency operation in April which it is hoped will provide support for additional resourcing.



- 3.5 The Public Space Protection Order for Newham has been reviewed and is in force on the Newham side of Wanstead Flats, it empowers Newham enforcement officers to tackle the anti-social behaviour taking place.
- 3.6 Operation Waxen – A joint patrol over 17 weeks between Epping Forest , police and EFDC to tackle flytipping, particularly in High Beach. Targeted patrols and vehicle stops have resulted in eight vehicles prosecuted for waste carrying and one vehicle seized.
- 3.7 The *#FightTheFlyTip* campaign to accompany Operation Waxen uses consistent digital messaging, volunteer recognition and public reporting calls-to-action, developed in cooperation with Epping Forest District Council and Essex Police, to raise awareness of Duty of Care responsibilities and

the rising cost and environmental impact of large-scale fly-tipping in Epping Forest.

- 3.8 An updated analysis of the cost of Flytipping to the charity has been undertaken and our new message is that:

Epping Forest suffers an average of 590 fly tips per year with a total of 160 tonnes. The total cost of dealing with this is £635,000 a year to the charity, representing 15% of the charity's budget. This includes staff time to remove the waste but also to investigate.

We investigate every fly tip and prosecute where possible, Almost half of all fly tips are household items, with a further quarter of tips being builders' waste. Illegal drug growing waste also presents a significant proportion of fly tips.

For 2024 we had a positive judicial disposal rate of 7% of all the fly tips which is higher than the national average that sits at 5%.

4. A beautiful Forest, sustaining an internationally and nationally important mosaic of wildlife habitats (Nature Conservation and Resilience)

Carbon Action Strategy

- 4.1 Wildfire Management training took place in March. Grey squirrel surveying commenced in February. A new fire fogger was purchased and will be stored at Wanstead Flats. A hydrological assessment for the leaky dams has started and due to be completed in June.
- 4.2 The ropes around the skylark area were installed in February and there has not been a repeat of the vandalism experienced last year.
- 4.3 London Fire Brigade are undertaking drone surveys on our behalf that will help us to map shrub for future management across the flats.
- 4.4 A local hedgelaying group have been installing willow hedge in Warren House gardens providing attractive cattle fencing. The work was undertaken voluntarily and training provided for staff.
- 4.5 Cattle have been loaned to graze at Roding Valley meadows to help initiate grazing on the nature reserve. It is hoped that this will be beneficial for invertebrates.
- 4.6 Consultant ecologists have been engaged to undertake baseline surveys for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessments, a review of the market potential and a BNG commercial assessment. The initial BNG report has now been drafted and will be reported shortly.
- 4.7 Thirty 'deer exclusion zones' have now been installed across the Forest by keepers and in accordance with the Forestry Commission specifications.
- 4.8 CSS work continues with up to eight contractors working simultaneously.

- 4.9 New fleet and machinery purchases included:
A new 165hp tractor was purchased to replace a 23-year-old existing tractor. New mini digger trailer to replace old one with new attachments, new tipper trailer, new trailer for tracker woodchipper, radio-controlled powered mower, new tractor water bowers for cattle welfare and new mower for Wanstead Flats football pitches to replace old machine.
- 4.10 Pre-movement Blue tongue & TB tests were carried out on yearling cattle to be sold. The result returned negative and the cattle moved off the holding in February instead of the previous September as planned. Carrying the yearlings over the winter used more feed than we made, so extra was purchased to last through to spring, at an additional cost of £1,200.
- 4.11 A whole herd TB test was passed in April so radial TB restrictions will no longer apply (6 month & pre-movement testing) and will revert to 4 year testing. A small team from Heathrow Animal Reception Centre came to assist with the testing to gain experience with handling large animals.
- 4.12 Members of the Ancient Tree Forum visited Epping Forest in April.
- 4.13 Staff from Hampstead Heath visited the Forest to practice aerial rescue with our arborists teams.
- 4.14 The Arborists teams undertook a restoration programme on the historic tree avenues in Wanstead Park and at Woodford Green, involving local communities to share understanding for the objectives of the work.

5. An Inspiring space benefitting peoples' health and providing opportunities for recreation and enjoyment

- 5.1 The 17 Brambly Hedge wooden figures were installed from the visitor centre to and around Connaught Water.
- 5.2 The Duke of Gloucester visited to launch the new 'Gloucester Ride' path that will link the Epping Forest Visitor Centre at Chingford to Connaught Water, protecting the SAC from erosion and providing a much-improved visitor experience that will link with the Brambly Hedge figures.
- 5.3 The Duke also visited the royal exhibition in the visitor centre, curated in honour of his Golden Jubilee as Ranger of Epping Forest, before moving on to an education focussed event hosted at Lopping Hall.
- 5.4 The Visitor Centre at Chingford has experienced a 66% increase in visitors in March 2025 when compared against March in 2024. This may be due to the installation of the Brambly Hedge Trail, although this won't be formally launched until September, when the path is installed.
- 5.5 On 21 March Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP visited the Epping Forest Visitor Centre at Chingford and the Brambly Hedge Trail.

- 5.6 Planning permission was granted for the play area in Wanstead Park to accommodate revisions to the original design. Installation will require supervision by MOLA for potential archaeological finds.
- 5.7 A Youth Litter Pick and Youth Conservation Session were held during the school holidays in the February half term and the Easter holidays. Several litter picking events were organised for the national Big Spring Clean campaign, including 'Top Picks' litter picks which have taken place with over 80 volunteers joining in.
- 5.8 Little Saplings pre-schooler events take place monthly, since February at the Epping Forest Visitor Centre at Chingford with 35 attendees joining in the fun so far.
- 5.9 Media coverage has included:
- Forest-silver stiletto fly find
 - BBC London skylarks lift off
 - BBC Radio 4's Open Country
 - Great British Railway Journeys
- 5.10 Bluebells in Chalet Wood attracted the usual media and social media attention. A press release was picked up by some channels advocating 'enjoy, don't destroy' messaging but the BBC unfortunately just promoted the photograph without the accompanying message. Despite concern voiced on social media, which was largely based on an image / social media post from another bluebell location that was circulating, the bluebells have increased and it appears the measures put in place over recent years are continuing to be effective and visitor behaviour around the bluebell woods is improving.

6. A range of special heritage landscapes which are protected and celebrated (Culture, Heritage and Learning)

- 6.1 Planning permission was granted and funding approved to implement the Grotto restoration plan. An HLF heritage at risk bid has been submitted to help top up the funding to implement the works.
- 6.2 Historic England are working with us to develop a two year project to investigate the results of the Forest wide LIDAR survey. An initial training session was held with 20 volunteers.
- 6.3 Damage at Ambresbury Banks was reported to Historic England and Essex Police who attended the site and will be monitoring further. Further signage and social media messaging was released following the recent damage, with further work required on enforcement and long-term visitor management being planned.

7. A resilient environment, where challenges are embraced and opportunities explored – income and (Community Engagement)

- 7.1 Mandy's tea hut finished trading at High Beach. A marketing exercise took place to find a suitable alternative provider but as this has been unsuccessful a wider piece of marketing will be undertaken in the near future.

8. Staff News

- 8.1 In total, at the end of the 24/25 year 24 new members of the workforce have been recruited.

- 8.2 New starters appointed and having commenced work this period include:

2 x Arborist Apprentices
Apprentice Estate Worker
2 x full time Forest Keepers
Wanstead Park Project Officer (p/t)
Stores person (p/t)
Assistant Conservation Officer
3 x part time Forest Keepers
Wedding and venue Hire Asst (p/t)
Enforcement Officer (p/t)

- 8.3 Appointments made but yet to start in roles:

Retail Supervisor (p/t)
3 x PT Forest keeper
Conservation Herd Manager
1 x Arborist

- 8.4 Advertised and in progress:

4 x f/t assistant Forest Keepers
Estate Worker
Asst Estate Worker
Health and Safety Apprentice
Visitor Experience Assistant (p/t)
Enforcement Officer

- 8.5 The new Forest Keeper rota has been consulted on and agreed and will start to be implemented in June.

- 8.6 Our grazing team attended Heathrow Animal Centre to assist with the handling of an import of cattle.

9. Volunteers

- 9.1 Online information session recruiting volunteers to carry out ecological surveys.
- 9.2 Two half day sessions held to train volunteers in conservation monitoring and surveys covering reptiles, small mammals and butterflies.
- 9.3 7 Top Picks, volunteer litter picking events, took place across various locations including; Wanstead Flats, Newgate Street, Gilberts Slade, Hollow Ponds, Lower Forest, Manor Park and Galley Hill with 64 volunteers participating.
- 9.4 Volunteer information Session held at the Visitor Centre at Chingford targeting recruitment for Visitor Centre volunteers.
- 9.5 Epping Forest Volunteer Wardens visited Burnham Beeches on 5 February to share best practice.
- 9.6 The Epping Forest 50 for 50 campaign, commemorating the Duke of Gloucester's Golden Jubilee as ranger of Epping Forest, concluded in January 2025, 67 dedicated volunteers contributed over 3,000 hours of service in 6 months, showcasing the remarkable variety of voluntary roles across the ancient forest.
- 9.7 Historic England led the Epping Forest Lidar Interpretation training on 2 April with 12 volunteers attending to enhance their knowledge.

10. Staff Training (whole teams)

In house training for Pole Saw
ILM Management Training (3 day course) for all line managers
Project Management Training (1 day) for all line managers
Mental Health for managers
Health and Safety Roadshow for all staff including Safe 365
First Aid
Wildfire Management
NPTC Lantra tractor course
Tree Architecture and Morphophysiology Symposium