City of London Corporation Committee Report

Appendices

Appendix 1: SSSI Condition Assessment Updates 2010 and 2014

1. The last SSSI condition assessment report submitted to Committee was September 2015 (SEF 41/15)[1]. The 2015 Committee Report presented the condition assessments of all Epping Forest units that were updated in 2010 with a further five SSSI units re-assessed in 2014. The resulting updated figures were presented alongside the 2010 numbers in the table below. Contributing factors for the "Unfavourable no change" in this category cover reasons of scrub encroachment, insufficient grassland management, poor condition of water bodies, and high levels of recreational pressure. The one unit in "Unfavourable declining" is Unit 133 Higham's Park & The Sale (this is still the case in 2025 as this unit has not been reported as updated since 2010). This is primarily for reasons of air pollution, but also poor condition of water bodies. Across all units, the most common issues, after air pollution and beech tree health, were the need for greater management of grasslands either through grazing or cutting, and the poor condition of water bodies.

Condition assessment	**Percentage of SSSI by area (%)** 2010 assessment/**2014 update**	**Hectares** 2010 assessment/**2014 update**	**Number of SSSI units** 2010 assessment/**2014 update**
Favourable	33.4/**29.3**	598.5/**524.7**	10/9
Unfavourable recovering	48.2/**54.2**	863.7/**970.3**	20/22
Unfavourable no change	14.3/**14.3**	255.8/**255.8**	7/**7**
Unfavourable declining	1.8/**0**	32.8/**0**	1/**0**

2. Historically the Government's Biodiversity 2020 Strategy[2] set a target of securing 95% of all SSSIs in 'Favourable' or 'Unfavourable recovering' condition by the year 2020. In order to gauge the condition of the SSSI, Natural England, undertakes assessment of the habitats. Large-scale SSSIs were broken down into SSSI "units". The Epping Forest SSSI comprises 41 units, three of which are not owned by the City Corporation (as Conservators of Epping Forest) but are included in the SSSI as they are contiguous with Forest land. A proportion of the units are assessed every year, with all units being assessed on a six-year rolling programme.

[1] The condition of Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) 2015
[2] Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services

Appendix 2: SSSI Condition Definitions and Key Threats and Pressures on Epping Forest SSSI

3. A SSSI feature is assessed as being in:
    - Favourable condition - The designated feature is being adequately conserved. The results from monitoring demonstrate that the feature is meeting all the mandatory site-specific monitoring targets set out in the monitoring specification (MS). The MS sets the minimum standard for favourable condition for the designated feature and there may be scope for the further (voluntary) enhancement of the feature.
    - Unfavourable recovering - when one or more of the notified features mandatory attributes are not meeting their target, but the necessary actions have been identified and recorded, at least one action is underway, and no actions are behind schedule to restore them to favourable condition;
    - Unfavourable no change – the feature is not being conserved. The feature will not return to favourable condition unless there is a change to the management of the site or external pressures; and
    - Unfavourable declining – the feature is not being conserved. The feature will not reach favourable condition unless there is a change to the management of the site or external pressures. The feature condition is becoming progressively worse over time.

4. With the last two categories, the longer a SSSI feature remains in this condition the more difficult it will be to restore it to favourable condition. It is not only the management of the site that affects a feature's condition. Climate change, air pollution, catastrophic events, pests and diseases will also have a bearing on the condition.

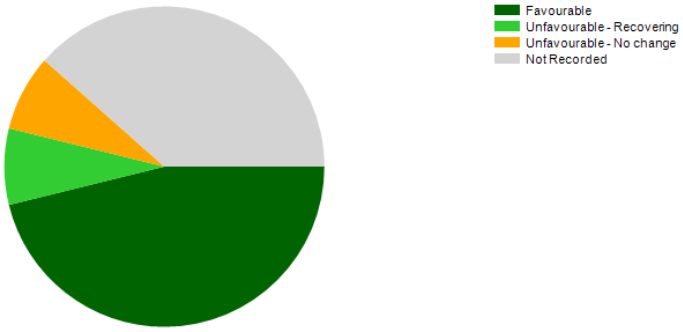
5. Natural England's objective is to achieve 'favourable condition' status for all SSSIs. The key threats and pressures[3],[4] on Epping Forest SSSI include:
    - Pressure: Requirement for ongoing woodland management.
    - Pressure: Invasive non native-species associated with freshwater habitats and undesirable species.
    - Pressure: Plant disease.
    - Pressure: Recreational disturbance and public access.
    - Pressure: Uncontrolled vegetation fire.
    - Pressure: Undergrazing.
    - Pressure: Air pollution, impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition.
    - Threat: Changes in species distribution on beech forests.
    - Threat: Inappropriate water levels on wet heathland.
    - Threat: Water pollution on wet heathland.

[3] Epping Forest SSSI - Pressures - Natural England Designated Sites View
[4] Natural England (2016) *Site Improvement Plan, Epping Forest SAC* https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/5732004727881728

Appendix 3: SSSI Condition Assessment Updates 2024 Onwards

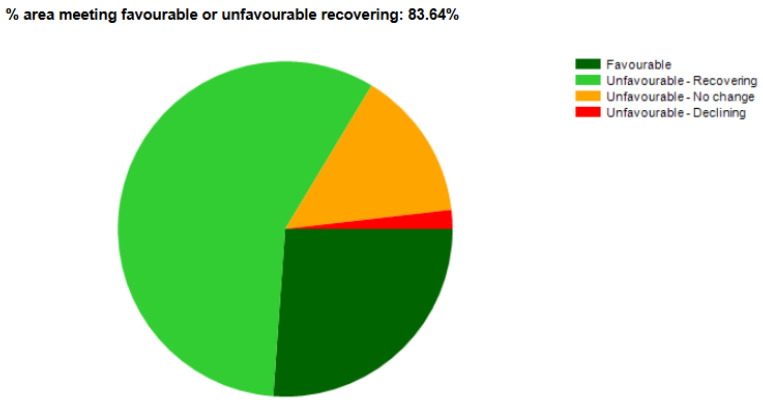
6. Of the total area of Epping Forest, 1,728 hectares (69.5%) is designated as a SSSI. The SSSI citation states: “Epping Forest is one of only a few remaining large-scale examples of ancient wood-pasture in lowland Britain and has retained habitats of high nature conservation value including ancient semi-natural woodland, old grassland plains and scattered wetland.” All three of the main lowland wood-pasture types in Britain are found in Epping Forest with a large number of ancient pollards. Other important features are the “nationally outstanding assemblage of invertebrates, a major amphibian interest and an exceptional breeding bird community”. The Forest’s intricate mosaic of habitats is key to the biodiversity found in the Forest.

7. In 2023 Natural England changed their approach to SSSI monitoring. Instead of subdividing SSSIs into units and making assessments of condition at the unit scale, they now assess the condition of special features across the whole of a SSSI. This approach, known as Whole Feature Assessment, helps to better understand what is affecting features and how SSSIs function as part of their wider landscape. There are 26 active SSSI features for Epping Forest, the condition status for Epping Forest as of April 2025 is:
   - Favourable – 12 features (46.15%).
   - Unfavourable Recovering – 2 features (7.69%).
   - Unfavourable No Change – 2 features (7.69%).
   - Not Recorded – 10 (38.46%).



Source: Natural England Designated Sites View SSSI Features (accessed 08/04/25). © Natural England copyright 2024

8. Under the ‘unit-based’ assessment approach, the condition status for Epping Forest as of April 2025 was:
   - Favourable – 26.14%.
   - Unfavourable Recovering –57.50%.
   - Unfavourable No Change –14.53%.
   - Unfavourable Declining – 1.83%.



Source: Natural England Designated Sites View SSSI Units (accessed 08/04/25). © Natural England copyright 2024

9. In 2024 three features were assessed with the condition status updated as shown in the table below. The reported updates on the condition of features can be viewed on Natural England's Designated Sites View webpage for Epping Forest SSSI: Natural England Designated Sites View Epping Forest SSSI Condition of Features

Year	Feature	Condition Status Update	Summary of the 2024 Update
Year 1 April 2024 – End March 2025	Lowland dry heath	Unchanged: Unfavourable Recovering	Overall, the dry heath is unfavourable recovering. Across the main sites (including Long Running, Furze Ground, Deershelter Plain West, Strawberry Hill Heath, Warren Hill Heath, Wanstead Flats and Dulsmead Heath) the cover of *Calluna vulgaris* with varied growth phases and presence of character graminoids (e.g., Heath grass, Mat grass, Heath woodrush & Heath rush) are all favourable attributes. However, the cover of vigorous grasses (e.g. Purple moor grass etc) is still excessive in some sites and desirable character herbs are generally rare, isolated and therefore vulnerable. The continued presence of some notable herbs (e.g., Heath spotted orchid) and Lichen (e.g. *Cladonia*), and regenerating heather seedlings are all positive signs. The current management (grazing, targeted scrapes, cutting) is maintaining the character and general composition of the community and therefore the feature is assessed as recovering. However the herb diversity currently remains low, and the small populations of rare and localised character plants are vulnerable to unfavourable air quality and localised site pressures (e.g. recreation, fires, encroachment etc) so the dry heath areas require regular monitoring and ongoing targeted conservation effort.
	Lowland wet heath	Unchanged: Unfavourable Recovering.	Overall, the wet heath feature is unfavourable recovering. Across the main sites of Sunshine Plain North & South, Deershelter Plain east and Long Running north, the cover of ericaceous shrubs (*Erica tetralix, Calluna vulgaris*) and varied growth phases are favourable, however the cover of Purple Moor grass is excessive. Additionally, although a sufficient diversity of character graminoids (sedge, rush, grasses) are present there is a very low diversity of character herbs and a sub-optimal cover of mosses, including Sphagnum. The current management (grazing, targeted scrapes, cutting) is maintaining the character and general composition of the community however the herb diversity currently remains low, and the small (and in some cases

Year	Feature	Condition Status Update	Summary of the 2024 Update
			declining) populations of rare and localised character plants are vulnerable to unfavourable air quality & hydrological conditions and localised site pressures (e.g., recreation etc) so they require regular monitoring and targeted conservation effort.
	Population of *Zygodon forsterii*	Improved to Favourable.	Overall, the *Zygodon forsteri* feature (NB species now taxonomically named *Codonoblepharon forsteri*) is currently in favourable condition meeting required population thresholds, accounting for 2019 & 2022 reports and 2024 site visits. For unit 111, the 2019 report records 66 colonies of *Zygodon forsterii* that are linked to at least 44 trees in unit 111, and cross-checking with the 2021 & 2022 reports lists a total of 47 trees with associated colonies. Additionally, there are another five colonies (at least) associated with five trees across units 106, 110 & 119 (2019, 2021 & 2022 reports) and an additional four trees with colonies listed in unit 211 (2019, 2021 & 2022 report). Field visits in 2024 confirmed these are mostly associated with exposed roots and knotholes, although notably four of the host trees support *Zygodon forsteri* colonies on raintracks (2019 report and 2024 visit). Many future veterans are available (mostly untagged) but there is a generation gap so conservation management and additional assistance for notable species such as *Zygodon forsteri* may be necessary. There is a significant loss of limbs & large veteran trees in key areas such as Court hill, Monks Wood, Loughton Camp. There are many older veterans with raintracks and buttress roots but very few currently support *Zygodon forsteri*. The impacts of mountain bikes and trampling need monitoring to aid management decisions. Additionally, the conditions were very dry during the Spring 2024 site visit. There are a large number of veteran trees (compared to the 'many older veterans' referenced above) of similar age to some of the host trees, with what appear to be suitable knotholes that are either not colonised or have no confirmed records yet of acting as a host tree for *Zygodon forsteri.*

*Specialist survey to be commissioned.

10. The table below also shows which features are proposed for assessment by Natural England in 2025-2028 (subject to change).

Year	Feature
Year 2 April 2025 – End March 2026	Lowland dry acid grassland U1 type
	Lowland dry acid grassland U4 type
Year 3 April 2026 – End March 2027	Amphibian assemblage*
	Invertebrate assemblages – to be determined (eg, W312 Sphagnum bog)*
	Invertebrate assemblages – to be determined (eg, F001 scrub edge, F003 scrub heath, F1 unshaded early successional mosaic, F112 open short sward, F3 shaded field & ground layer)*
	Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
	Veteran Trees
Year 4 April 2027 – End March 2028	Invertebrate assemblages – to be determined (eg W1 – flowing water, W211 – open water on disturbed sediments, population of Stag Beetle)*
	Breeding bird assemblage
	Bryophyte assemblage*
	Fungi assemblage*

11. Many of the condition assessment surveys scheduled in the table above require specialist surveys to be commissioned by Natural England, this is dependent on their funding and resourcing and, therefore, subject to change. Epping Forest staff are reviewing opportunities to support Natural England in undertaking the amphibian surveys in 2026 and ensuring existing data is provided for all features where it exists. Epping Forest staff have provided data on breeding birds and will also have data on the veteran trees and fungi.

12. Using environmental DNA (eDNA) monitoring methods, 15 waterbodies will be surveyed in 2025 by the Epping Forest Conservation team for amphibian species presence-absence (via metabarcoding) to support the SSSI amphibian assemblage surveys in 2026.