

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest & Commons	21 November 2016
Subject: Dedications and Sponsorship in Epping Forest SEF 35/16	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest	For Decision
Report Author: Jacqueline Eggleston – Head of Visitor Services	

Summary

The Epping Forest visitor survey conducted between 2010 and 2015, reinforced by much anecdotal feedback, indicates that Epping Forest holds many strong and positive associations with peace, tranquillity and happiness resulting from public engagement with the open space. Given these associations a significant number of requests for commemorative items particularly benches and tree plantings are regularly received from the Forest's visitors, usually to reflect a loved one's connection with the Forest.

Currently, based on previous policy directions from 2000, and again in 2013, these requests are sensitively declined, reflecting your Committee's concerns regarding the impact of the installation of 'infrastructure' such as benches, bins, gates etc. on the 'natural aspect' of the Forest and consideration of the Forest's natural regeneration and local provenance policies for trees.

This report seeks to review the current approach and better reflect public aspiration and the Department's objective of facilitating public involvement with the management of open spaces. A draft policy is suggested that offers ways to commemorate people or events over a fixed period in return for structured investments that are in keeping with both the natural aspect of particular places and planting and biosecurity policies, as well as securing an important additional source of income for investment in the Forest.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Delegate to the Superintendent of Epping Forest powers to approve requests for dedications and sponsorship in line with the draft Policy for Dedications and Sponsorship and in accordance with any approved charging schedule. and to approve the Policy for Dedications and Sponsorship

Background

1. The Epping Forest Visitor Survey conducted between 2010 and 2015 reveals many positive impressions of the Forest together with a significant number of requests for improvements including more public toilets and seats at resting places; better signage and maps; additional events; improved local public transport and further refreshment facilities.
2. Requests from the public are frequently received for the installation of new or replacement of old seats and benches within the Forest, ideally accompanied by a commemorative plaque in memory of friends or relatives, together with interest in opportunities for tree planting and sponsorship of items in the Forest.
3. Your Committee has a long standing policy that such requests for commemorative items, even where sponsorship is offered, are refused, except in exceptional circumstances and by agreement of your Committee. Proposals for memorial benches were last considered and declined in 2000 at George Green, following repeated requests by the London Borough of Redbridge. In 2013, as part of the Connaught Water Easy Access Trail proposals to provide sponsored resting places at 200 metre intervals in accordance with the national access charity the Fieldfare Trust's National Access Standards were declined.
4. Conversely, some longer-standing agreements exist under care and maintenance arrangements with local authorities for specific sponsored or commemorative benches in specific areas. To applicants whom we turn down for similar dedications on the same or neighbouring land this can appear inconsistent.
5. A 'Policy for the Management of Memorials, Shrines and Tributes on Epping Forest Land' was adopted in 2010 to provide measures for the management and ultimate removal of roadside shrines and other informal memorials in Epping Forest at the point of fatal accidents or suicides. This would include any tributes, flowers etc. being left on any dedicated benches. During discussions on this policy some members proposed memorial benches and plantings as a way of managing the expectations of the bereaved.
6. Many charities and local authorities now offer commemorative public giving schemes which allow supporters to make donations in return for an acknowledgement such as 'sponsor a bench, tree, animal etc.' with accompanying newsletter, certificate or similar online dedication. A similar scheme in Epping Forest would help to raise the funding required to repair and renew infrastructure across the Forest.

Current Position

7. Following recent rounds of 2011/12-2013/14 and 2015/16-2017/18 efficiency savings; the growing pressure on tree health through the arrival of a new range of tree pests and diseases; the growing cost of litter and fly tipping management and new national standards around wellbeing the Epping Forest Grounds

Maintenance budget is unable to meet these combined demands without additional financial investment.

8. Officers are working on a policy for standardising Forest 'furniture' and rationalising signage and infrastructure. An audit of the current number and condition of Forest furniture is underway but it is evident that there are already large numbers of benches, bins etc. in a state of disrepair or nearing the end of their useful lifespan that now need renewing. It is clear that the cost of replacing existing items now in disrepair and to bring them up to current standardisation will take at least twenty years using current budget availability.
9. The restrictions associated with the pressure on the Additional Works Programme repairs are constraining necessary investment in significant infrastructure projects within Epping Forest, including facilities such as the Whitehall Plain bridge over the River Ching, which is estimated to cost £150,000 for a new all-year pedestrian bridge. Similarly, some large-scale historic avenue planting schemes are coming to the end of their natural life or face new disease risks and it will require significant investment to renew and replace these projects. With sufficient imagination and presentation large-scale projects such as the Whitehall Plain Bridge and major tree avenues could attract sponsorship, possibly including naming rights.

Options

10. Your Committee has two possible options:

- a. Maintain the current policy position restricting permissions for memorial and sponsorship requests. This position would continue to frustrate the public desire to invest in Epping Forest and will prevent the City from accessing new funding sources for investment in infrastructure and landscaping projects. **This option is not recommended.**
- b. Revise the policy approach providing delegated approval for memorial and sponsorship requests in 'managed areas' within Epping Forest. This position would facilitate the public desire to invest in Epping Forest and will enable the City to access new funding sources for investment in infrastructure and landscaping projects. **This option is recommended.**

Proposal

11. Under the Epping Forest Acts 1878 & 1880 your Committee must preserve the natural aspect of the Forest as far as possible, whilst also facilitating public recreation and enjoyment. The new policy position aims to preserve the natural aspect by utilising infrastructure that is complementary to its surrounds (see Appendix A for examples). Infrastructure will also be restricted to particular locations. Due care and consideration will be given to maintenance issues (access, trees above, etc.) as well as any sensitivities around encouraging anti-social behaviour.

12. Dedications of structures or furniture would be limited in number and restricted generally to more formally managed amenity areas of the Forest where more 'park-style' interventions have already been accepted such as at Theydon Green, George Green and Wanstead Park. Similarly where areas have been provided as Easy Access Trials, the Fieldfare Trust Physical Access Standard of benches every 1-300 metres could be reasonably achieved again without damage to the natural aspect. It is unlikely that sufficient locations would be found to meet demand. Nevertheless, such dedications would provide the financial opportunity to replace and provide existing furniture where it is needed.
13. There is a genuine demand for such memorial items and ways to remember loved ones. This policy offers the opportunity to respond to demand in a positive way whilst still protecting the 'wildness' of the Forest.
14. Other opportunities to provide dedications or commemorate occasions or people that have no impact on the Forest could also be provided in return for a contribution. Suggestions include 'dedicate a keystone tree' or support for a Species Recovery Programme for which donors would receive a certificate and photograph but no actual inscription or recognition within the Forest itself.
15. Further opportunities for similar schemes could be created in the future associated with specific tree planting or particular projects.
16. The draft policy is mindful of the need to make any scheme sustainable. Therefore dedication of anything tangible must be time limited and allow for costs of disease, repair, vandalism and routine maintenance and replacement. The costs of any scheme will reflect this and the time limitations on any dedication will need to be made very clear.
17. In terms of marketing, it is proposed that the Dedication and Sponsorship Schemes will be launched through the usual media channels, on our website and with a leaflet.
18. The introduction to the scheme will include key messages such as:

'Through the Epping Forest Act 1878 the City of London Corporation rescued the Forest from enclosure and enshrined in law the need to 'keep Epping Forest uninclosed and unbuilt on, as an open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public'.

'The Epping Forest charity cares for and protects over 7000 acres of mixed woodland, including over 100 ponds, 7 listed buildings, 3 ancient monuments, 2 historic gardens and 1600 hectares of Special Areas of Conservation. Among a canopy of over a million trees over 50,000 of these are classed as ancient (at least around 500 years old). As a charity we rely not just on core funding from the City of London Corporation but also on income from fees, donations and revenue from our commercial operations'.

Implications

19. **Financial:** All schemes provide sufficient income to cover initial capital costs, maintenance, repair and renewal where necessary and administration as well as a contribution for reinvestment in the Forest of at least 25%.

For illustrative purposes the cost of dedication of a bench will be £2,788 for a 10 year period. This is based on the following formula:

Supply of one bench (Bransom Leisure) 1.5m	£750
Installation – labour at 2 ‘work days’	£300
Contribution of 30% for renewal/ repair (max 1 renewal inc. labour)	£350
Maintenance (cleaning every 2 years)	£500
Administration and site visits 2 days	£300
25% contribution to the Epping Forest charity	£558
TOTAL published cost of bench	£2788 + VAT (£3345)

20. Costings for schemes will be determined annually in line with inflation and market benchmarking. Proposed revisions will be reported to the Epping Forest and Commons Committee annually as part of the Annual report on Licence fees and charges.
21. **Legal** – Under section 7 of the Epping Forest Act 1878 the Conservators shall at all times keep Epping Forest uninclosed and unbuilt on, as an open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public, and shall at all times as far as possible preserve the natural aspect of the Forest. However, the Conservators also have a number of statutory powers to provide facilities and carry out works. For example, under section 8 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1977, and subject to the obligation to preserve the natural aspect of the Forest, the Conservators may, for the purpose of providing or improving opportunities for the enjoyment of the Forest by the public and in the interests of persons resorting to the Forest, provide such facilities, services and works as may appear to them to be necessary or expedient.

Conclusion

22. The Policy for Dedications and Sponsorship in Epping Forest offers the opportunity to those with a strong personal connection to the Forest to celebrate those connections through a suitable memorial or sponsorship item. The provision of these opportunities would also enable new sources of investment for the management of Epping Forest.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Policy for Dedications and Sponsorship in Epping Forest

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