

Committees	Dated:
Open Spaces & City Gardens – For decision West Ham Park – For Information Epping Forest & Commons – For Information Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen’s Park – For Information	5 December 2016 5 December 2016 16 January 2017 30 January 2017
Subject: Bats in Trees Policy	Public
Report of: Sue Ireland – Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
Report author: Martin Rodman – Superintendent of Parks & Gardens	

Summary

Some 64% of the City Corporation’s Open Spaces are comprised of woodland or wood pasture, which are ideal habitats for bats. Although each Open Spaces division manages its tree stock in a way that maximises biodiversity and protects native fauna through local procedures, there is currently no overarching departmental policy to ensure consistency of approach to the management of work around bat roosts. Causing harm to bats or damaging their roosts (even accidentally), is a criminal offence.

Officers have worked with a specialist consultant to produce a departmental Policy which, when implemented, will help minimise the risk of causing harm to bats.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Approve the Bats in Trees Policy for adoption by the Open Spaces Department;
- Agree that the Bats in Trees Policy be shared with other relevant departments in order to ensure a consistent approach to management across the City Corporation.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Corporation (CoL) owns and manages approximately 11,000 acres of green space, managed by its Open Spaces Department. This includes

approximately 7,080 acres of trees (64% of total open space), ranging from stands of historic woodland and wood pasture, to garden and street trees.

2. Trees provide important roosting sites for bats but are very difficult to survey. Because of the nature of the CoL estate, the organisation is responsible for large numbers of veteran trees which, by their nature, require extensive works to maintain. As these trees also provide excellent opportunities for bat roosts, there is the potential for the two to conflict and unwittingly destroy roosts.

Current Position

3. With the merger of Ashted Common and Burnham Beeches into the same division, it became apparent that bat surveys prior to tree work were being carried out in different ways. Further enquiries found that this also differed with work done at other divisions.
4. Although there are clear operational differences between each of the Open Spaces divisions, it was felt that an overarching policy would be beneficial in ensuring that legal requirements are followed.
5. The Bats in Trees Policy (attached at Appendix 1) aims to ensure a consistent approach, while leaving scope for each division to adapt to their individual circumstances. It should be viewed as equivalent to the Tree Safety policy (adopted July 2014) both in terms legal compliance and operational consistency. Like Tree Safety, it is essential that the organisation can demonstrate that it has a clear policy in place, that procedures are carried out, and that there is documentation in place to demonstrate that procedures have been followed.
6. It is worth noting that virtually all prosecutions relating to bats so far have involved local authorities. However, The City is extremely unusual in that the majority of work carried out on trees is for conservation reasons, which serves to enhance the conditions favourable to bats.
7. An independent consultant with extensive experience of bats and trees has been involved in this process and has approved the draft policy which is felt to be appropriate to the City's situation and needs.

Proposals

8. Subject to your Committee's approval, it is proposed that the Open Spaces Department adopts the Bats in Trees Policy immediately, and that officers implement the actions outlined therein.
9. Furthermore, it is proposed to share these documents with other departments that also have a responsibility for managing trees on City Corporation land, for example Community & Children's Services, City Surveyors, and the City of London Freeman's School.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

10. A policy that ensures the protection and preservation of native species on our sites links directly to the Open Spaces Business Plan 2016-19, Departmental Objective OSD1: *Protect and conserve the ecology, biodiversity and heritage of our sites.*

Implications

11. Legal Implications – All bats in the UK are protected by law, and so are their roosts. The legislation protecting bat species, and the penalties for failing to abide by it, are set out on pages 2 and 3 of Appendix 1.

Conclusion

12. A consistent, co-ordinated approach to the management of bat habitats across all City open spaces is important in order to protect vulnerable species, protect staff from the risk of prosecution, and to protect the City Corporation's reputation.

13. By adopting the proposed Bats in Trees Policy and implementing the measures laid out therein, officers will help reduce the risk of harm to bats and their roosts to an absolute minimum.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Bats in Trees Policy

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