

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	11 September 2017
Subject: SEF 23/17 Epping Forest Work Programme Out-turn for 2016-17	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest	For Information
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Summary

This report summarises the work completed as part of the access and habitat Work programme for Epping Forest from **April 2016 to March 2017** inclusive.

Amongst the **highlights** were:

- a total of £287,201 of agri-environment income supported the essential habitat conservation work in the Forest;
- over 25 hectares of wood-pasture restoration work was achieved by in-house teams and contractors, one of the highest acreages achieved in any year;–.
- volunteers also played a significant role in restoring the Forest's internationally-important wood-pasture as well as tackling the threat of non-native species;
- 40 tonnes of invasive Floating Pennywort was removed from Perch Pond;
- 15 hectares of rhododendron was removed to prevent the establishment of Ramorum disease in the Forest;
- Trueloves fencing was completed allowing the site to be grazed for the first time in 2017;
- major improvements to Hill Wood Car park's capacity, safety and amenity.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- note this report.

Main Report

Background

1. This report reviews the conservation and access projects, habitat management and tree safety work achieved during the year 2016-17. The habitat work programme is drawn from the Epping Forest Management Plan approved in 2004 and other strategy documents approved since, including the works related to the *Branching Out* Project and the Grazing Expansion Plan. Background details of the projects can be found in the main Management Plan and in the other documents listed below under '*Background Papers*'.

General Review of the Year

2. **Funding and support:** The habitats work programme is supported financially by Natural England through its Environmental Stewardship Scheme as either Entry Level Scheme (ELS) payments or Higher Level Scheme (HLS) funding, as well as additional capital grants for specific qualifying works.
3. The management of most of the grasslands in the Forest and on the Buffer Lands is covered by payments under the ELS, with additional income for grassland management from the Basic Payment Scheme, administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).
4. Other habitats work in the Forest, especially within the scrub and wooded areas, is supported by specific HLS payments at higher rates of payment and this includes cattle grazing, wood-pasture restoration and scrub management.
5. **Forest Operations:** **Chart 1** below summarises in percentage of time the annual activity by the forest operations team for the 2014-16. The categories are general activity categories and there is additional detail behind these figures. **Charts 2 and 3** present the detail behind Site Safety and Legal activity and a breakdown of our work on Habitats generally, i.e. including woodland and non-woodland habitats.
6. In future years similar data will be included for contractor activity and costs will be apportioned to the activities so that a more accurate picture of how resources are allocated can be presented.

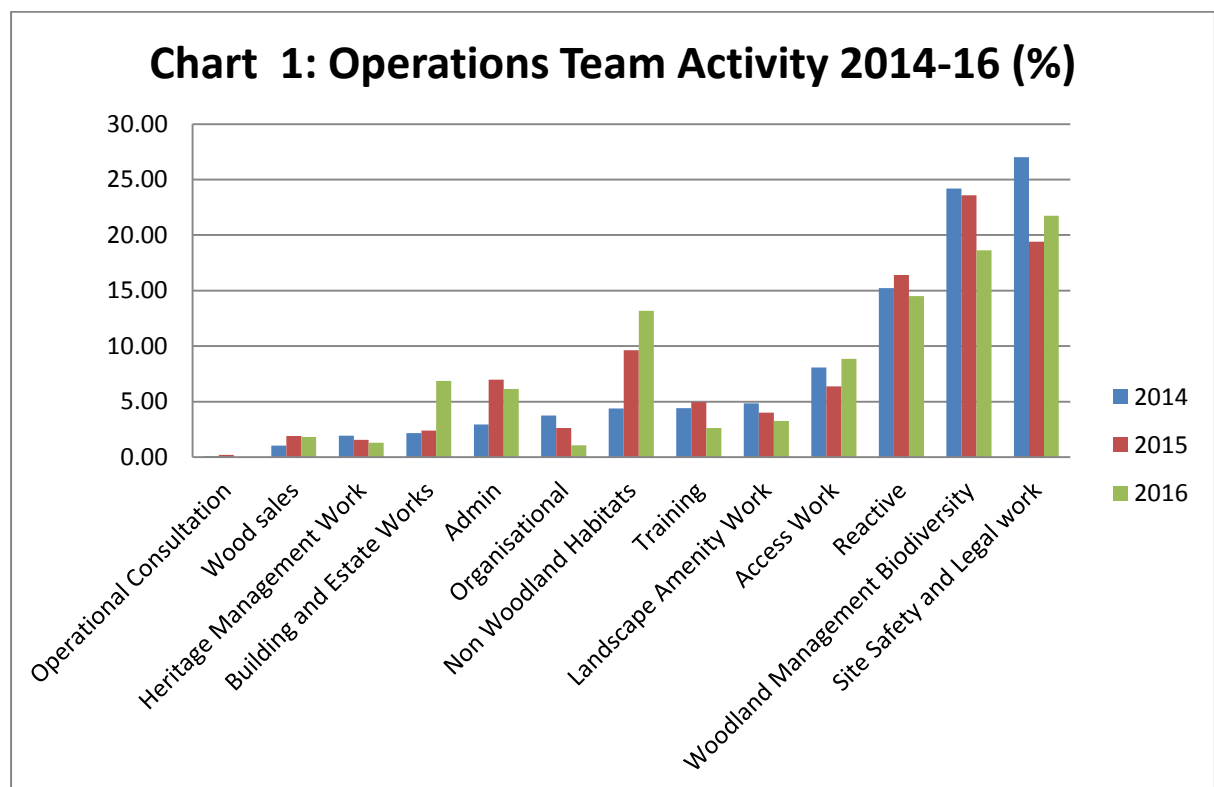


Chart 2: OPERATIONS TEAM TIME SPENT ON SAFETY AND LEGAL ACTIVITY IN 2014-16 (%)

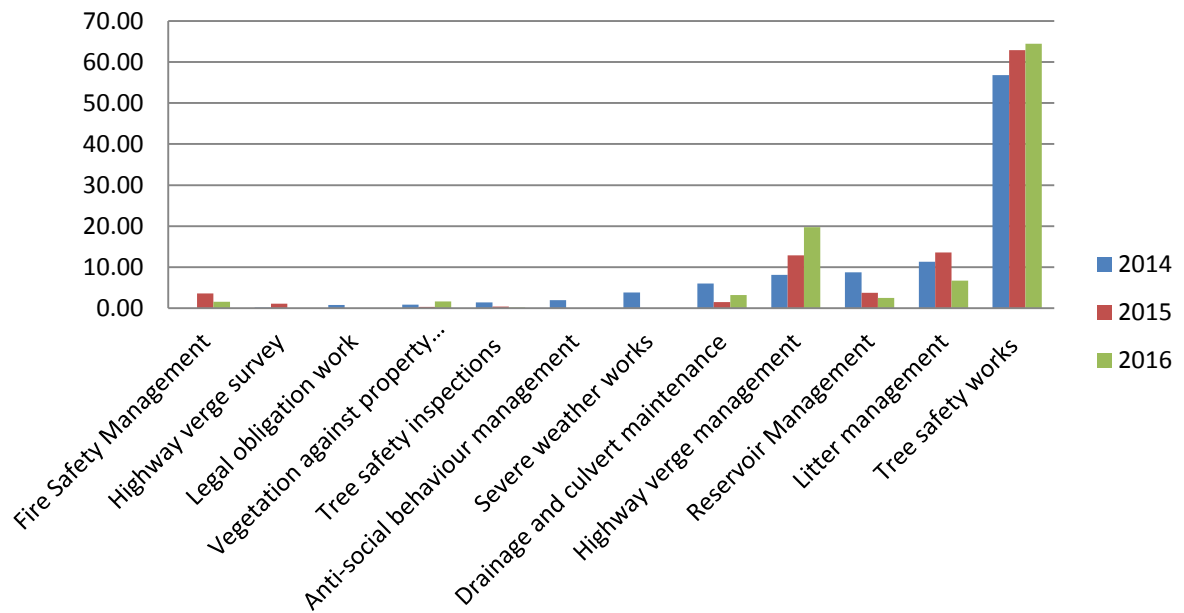
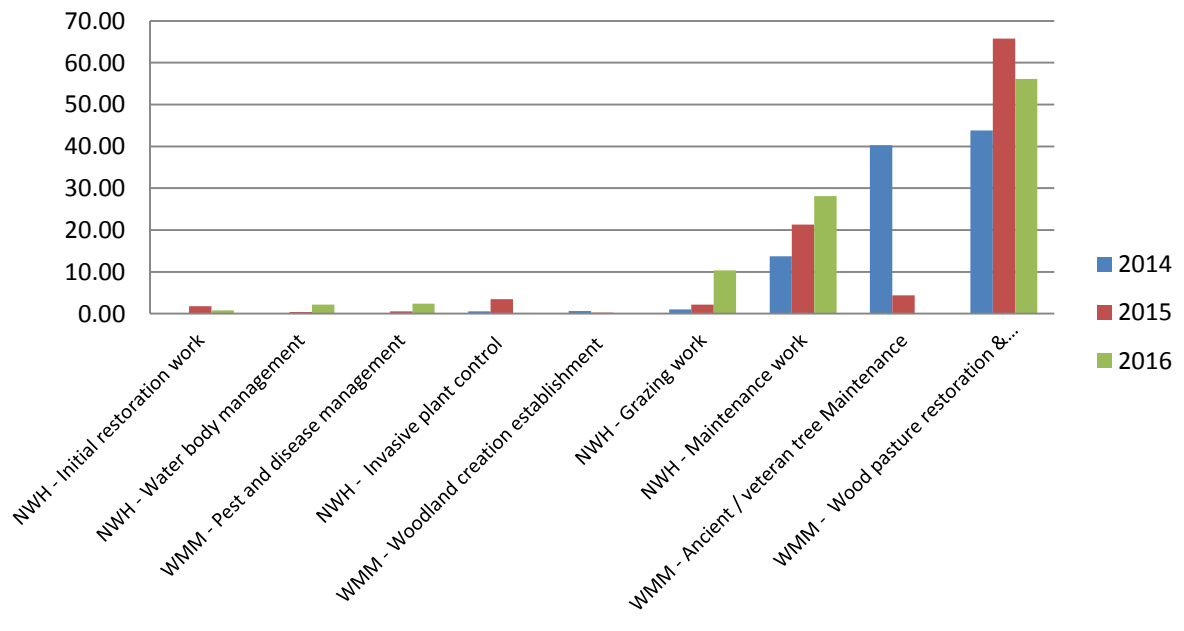


Chart 3: OPERATIONS TEAM HABITAT MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY 2014-16 (%)



7. **Volunteers:** This year's work by volunteers was carried out at over 20 sites across the Forest by the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) and Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT).

8. EFCT carried out work at Lord's Bushes and Gas Ride (near The Warren) amongst other sites and, of particular note was the volunteers' work on tackling the removal of rhododendron at Paul's Nursery as part of the Ramorum disease control effort over the winter.
9. The EFCV carried out work in 19 sites during the year, directed by the Biodiversity Officer, with multiple tasks at several key sites, in particular putting a lot of effort into wood-pasture restoration work in Lord's Bushes and Bury Wood.

Wood-pasture Restoration and woodland/scrub management

10. This year, in addition to the work carried out by the Forest Operations teams across the Forest, three specialist woodland contractors were also employed to carry out wood-pasture restoration tasks at specific sites. This was the first year in which contractors had been used so extensively for such work and this extra input of resources enabled an additional 8.2 ha of habitat restoration to be achieved.
11. The contractors worked within five of the 38 Forest Compartments (Comps): Walthamstow Forest (Comp 34), Barn Hoppitt (Comp 29), Lord's Bushes (Comp 32), High Beach-Pillow Mounds (Comp 14) and Honey Lane Quarters (Comp 9). The work consisted largely of the felling and removal of infilling Holly, Hornbeam and Birch that have grown up in amongst the ancient trees and shaded out the ground flora and flowering shrubs. Younger trees were also selected and left to provide successor habitats and new pollards.
12. In addition the Forest Operations teams carried out work across 7 compartments and completed 17 hectares of restoration work. This included areas of mulching, using a hired forestry mulcher, where smaller infilling trees were removed mechanically in Bury Wood, Gilbert's Slade, Walthamstow Forest and Warren Wood Slope.
13. As well as improving the wood-pasture habitat and working towards achieving SSSI favourable condition, the work described in the above paragraphs has enhanced the visitor access and experience of the Forest by opening up vistas through the areas and creating more space for walking and exploring the Forest.

Grazing, Grassland Management & Restoration

14. HLS work on scrub control was completed using a tractor-mounted mulcher borrowed from The Commons Division in a good example of efficiency savings through shared machinery use. This machine was used to clear invasive broom on Wanstead Flats and invasive gorse and broom on Leyton Flats, both helping to restore acid grassland and allowing area for expansion of heather at Leyton Flats. This work also enhanced visitor access around Hollow Ponds where routes were becoming blocked or over-hung by tall scrub.
15. The dry summer and autumn meant that it was a very successful year and tractor-work went well into the winter when in most years activity is restricted from mid-October onwards. Contractors cut 72 ha with a further 90 ha cut as haylage from the Buffer Lands. In-house teams cut 138 ha of conservation and amenity

areas in 2016, which included the cumulative area for sites with multiple cuts such as Queens Green at High Beach.

16. Due to the good conditions the Grasslands Team were able to undertake additional work on the Buffer Lands to cut areas of coarse grass growth and brambles to help improve these pastures for grazing.
17. A fourth contractor (see paragraph 9 above) was employed to remove trees and reduce scrub around the edges of Trueloves to restore flower-rich grassland habitats and also prepare access routes for fencing, which was carried out by the same contractor.
18. Trueloves was also fenced around its entire perimeter with stock-proof fencing and three new gate access points for horse-riders, which were modified following feedback from horse-riders to meet their requirements better. Trueloves will now be grazed from summer 2017 onwards and this will reduce the requirements for mowing this site and should help to retain the invertebrate biodiversity of this diverse grassland
19. Fernhills grasslands were also restored in extent by further scrub removal, by the contractor used at Trueloves. This work also allowed better access across the site for visitors and the grazing cattle.
20. **Grazing:** in October the contract with Wildlife & Countryside Services was terminated by mutual agreement. Committee in November 2016 (SEF 50/16) approved the transfer of the grazing operation in-house. During the winter 2016-17, a combination of 37 animals purchased and 15 births resulted in the growth of the City's Longhorn herd to 101 animals.

Wetlands and Pond Management

21. Control works on the Floating Pennywort in the Perch pond were very successful and made a significant impact. Following an initial physical clearance of the weed from the lake when over 40 tonnes was estimated to have been cleared specialist contractors undertook monthly herbicide treatment of the remaining colonies. There was a risk of the treatment adversely impacting other non-target marginal vegetation however such spray drift damage was kept to a minimum. Further herbicide control work will be required in 2017

Invasive Non-native species and Pathogen related work

22. In addition to the work on Floating Pennywort, other non-native species were a focus of considerable resources during the year. The discovery of Chestnut Gall Wasp, Oak Processionary Moth, Chalara (Ash Dieback) and Ramorum disease all in this same year coincided with a very dry summer and autumn during which trees showed general signs of stress, including wilting and browning of leaves and branch drop during August 2016.
23. Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHNs) were served by the Forestry Commission (FC) for the gall wasp at Wanstead Park and the OPM nest site at Trueloves. The OPM site was sprayed with a natural insecticide in March 2017 as a precautionary measure, following national guidelines. The Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) served separate SPHNs for the two Ramorum infection sites at

Wanstead Park and The Warren Plantation. Nearly 15ha of rhododendron was cleared by in-house staff and contractors, with grant-aid of over £47,000 from the Forestry Commission. Details of the Ramorum work are covered in a separate companion report to the Committee, which is for decision.

Visitor Access work

24. **Hill Wood Car Park Improvement:** in coordination with the tenant of the tea-hut at Hill Wood Car Park a major package of works was completed that saw the security and condition of the car park improved. Facilities for visitors were also much improved with new picnic tables installed and motor bike parking facilities upgraded. Works were undertaken by both in-house and contract teams.
25. **Car Park Security:** to help improved security at our car park we undertook improvements to car parks along Coppice Row. These involved installing robust in and out gates along with a larger tarmac entrance splay to help reduce problem of potholes as people leave the car park. While relatively expensive, at an average cost of around £18,000 per car park, they have helped considerably to reduce the significant Anti-Social Behaviour problems at the car parks concerned.
26. **Seats at Wanstead Park:** The Friends of Wanstead Parklands were successful in raising the funds to finance new seating at the Café by the Heronry Pond. The work to install the seating was undertaken in May 2017

Risk Management Activity

27. **Highways Vegetation Management:** 2016 was the second year of a three-year contract with a local contractor to manage the Forest's highway verge vegetation. Work started a little later than planned but, nonetheless, 33 km of highway verge in total was cut by contractors across the Forest. The programme of over-hanging branch removal was carried out to ensure the highways were cleared to the statutorily-required height for high-sided vehicles. To do this work, as in previous years, a converted open-topped bus was hired that has a work platform and wood-chipper which allowed efficient and safe-working at the required height.
28. Overall this is the most effective and least expensive method of carrying out this type of work but within the London Borough areas in the south of the Forest operational costs were increased due to the need to pay a congestion charge of £200/day for the bus on top of the bus hire charge.
29. **Tree Safety Management:** all trees identified as requiring safety management work by the City Corporations appointed independent inspectors were tackled as required. In addition, two Massaria surveys were undertaken, to add to the inspections carried out during the safety works, on 451 London Plane trees in the Forest. This disease, discovered some years ago in the Forest, has resulted in considerably increased work requirements to make safe issues arising from these trees which are typically along roadsides.
30. The Tree Safety zone map was also updated during the year and this provided the opportunity to revise the zoning. This revised zoning, in line with the National Tree Safety Group (NTSG 2011) guidelines on tree hazards, will make the

amount of annual survey work, and subsequent management treatments, more manageable without compromising safety. A further revision will be undertaken in 2017 to consider the classification of the roadsides

31. **Jubilee Pond Protection:** Two pilot projects were completed to trial different methods of protecting the edge of the newly-lined pond from the intensive pressure by geese and wave erosion. In-house staff installed large granite boulders backfilled with stone to create a hard protective edge to the pond and to date this seems to have worked well. At a cost of £300/m this will present a significant investment for the remaining 100m left to protect on the pond's shore.
32. Staff and volunteers from the EFCT using brushwood sourced from the Forest installed a brushwood barrier around a number of the islands in the pond. The hope is that this will reduce damage by wave erosion and the same time as creating an improved opportunity for sediment to gather and plants to establish. The success of this established traditional practice is still being monitored.
33. **Churchill Avenue, Woodford Green:** work was not undertaken on the avenue as planned during the year. Initial discussions to help formulate a possible approach to the management of this avenue were undertaken. Given the prominence of the avenue in the local landscape of this local authority Conservation Area (Woodford Green) a detailed public consultation will be required before significant work can be progressed.

Implications

34. **Corporate & Strategic Implications:** the achievements highlighted in this report meet the *City Together* Strategy by contributing to "*a world class City that promotes and enhances our environment*". In relation to the Open Spaces Department's Business Plan Improvement Objectives, these achievements meet the objective to "*promote sustainability, biodiversity and heritage*"
35. **Financial Implications:** the total of income from Environmental Stewardship this year towards grazing and wood-pasture restoration work amounted to £164,233 plus an additional £7,290 in capital grants. The Basic Payment Scheme funding towards grassland management amounted to a total of £115,678.
36. Taken together the agri-environment support for the Forest's and buffer lands' habitat conservation work was, therefore, **£287,201**.

Conclusions

37. This year saw a considerable amount of change and large challenges to the management of the Forest in the form of non-native species and tree diseases, the replacement of the grazing contractor and the first extensive use of contractors for SSSI habitat conservation work. A series of planned changes to management have improved the way in which the operations are achieved. Invasive non-native species remain a considerable threat to the long-term health of the Forest and represent a growing and significant financial burden,

Appendices

- None

Background Papers:

- The Epping Forest Management Plan 2004-2010
- The Barn Hoppit Wood-pasture Restoration Plan 2006-2011
- The Lords Bushes and Knighton Woods Integrated Site Plan 2004-2010
- The Wanstead Flats Integrated Site Plan 2006-2011
- *Branching Out Stage II* Project Plan (Nov 2008) – including the Keystone Trees and Grazing Strategies
- SEF 01/13 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: Grazing Expansion Plan for Implementing the Epping Forest Grazing Strategy. 13th February 2013.
- Wanstead Park Conservation (2011)
- SEF 50/16 Epping Forest & Commons Committee Report: Epping Forest Grazing Expansion Plan Continuity Arrangements. 21st November 2016.

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