



Epping Forest Consultative Group Wednesday 19 June 2024, 19:00

Logistics: **In person:** The Warren, Loughton, IG10 4RW
Remotely: Use the Microsoft Teams link in your calendar to join the meeting

Agenda

This meeting is being chaired by Verderer Morris

1	Welcome and Apologies for Absence	Verderer Morris
2	Approval of Minutes and Matter Arising	Verderer Morris
3	Operational Review <ul style="list-style-type: none">Staffing updateAD update Epping Forest	Jacqueline Eggleston, Superintendent Jacqueline Eggleston, Superintendent
4	Operational Forward Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Management Plan actions update	Jacqueline Eggleston, Superintendent
5	Engagement & Consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Update on A104 Essex HighwayFuture of football consultation	David Sprunt, Essex County Council Jacqueline Eggleston, Superintendent
6	Any Other Business	All
7	Date of Next Meeting: 16 October 2024	All

For information

[22 May Epping Forest & Commons Committee Papers](#)

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[Meeting Link](#)

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Epping Forest Consultative Group
Wednesday 28th February 2024 at 7pm
Hybrid meeting
Held at the Warren Office and via *Microsoft Teams*
Notes

Present:

Verderer Paul Morris (Chair of Meeting)
Benjamin Murphy (Chairman of EF&CC)
Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Judith Adams, Epping Forest Heritage Trust
Susan Creevy, Loughton Residents Association
Robert Smith, Butterfly Conservation (Cambridgeshire and Essex Branch)
Tim Wright, Orion Harriers
Brian McGhie, Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers
Richard Arnopp – The WREN Group
Carol Pummell, Epping Forest Riders Association
Emily Brennan, Natural Environment Director
Juliane Heinecke, Support Services Officer
Valerie Jones, West Essex Ramblers
Gill James, Friends of Wanstead Parklands
Jacqueline Eggleston, Interim Assistant Director/Superintendent of Epping Forest
Amba Nkundo, Executive Assistant
Yvette Woodhouse, Interim Head of Business Development
Tris Vetta, Interim Head of Business Development
Laura Lawson, Head of Operations

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The following apologies were received:

Caroline Haines, Deputy Chairman
Tim Harris, WREN Group
Linda Woods, Royal Epping Forest Golf Club
Bruce Mackie, Lee Valley Youth Cycling Club
Elizabeth Burn, Theydon Bois and District Rural Preservation
Verderer HH William Kennedy
Verderer Nicholas Munday
Andy Irvine, Bushwood Area Residents Association
George Lund, Epping Forest Transport Action Group

2. Approval of Minutes and Matter Arising

The last meeting minutes were agreed.

3. Operational Review

a) Natural Environment strategies

Emily Brennan provided an overview of the new vision, mission, and strategic priorities for the Natural Environment Board, which was previously known as Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee. The name change aims to emphasise a landscape-scale approach, collaboration, and alignment with broader corporate priorities such as the climate action strategy and business engagement in the Square Mile.

Emily highlighted the extensive consultation process among staff and members to develop these strategies. The new vision emphasises open spaces rich in diversity, nature conservation, and enhancing lives. The mission focuses on protecting and improving 11,000 acres of open spaces in London and the Home Counties, ensuring accessibility, sustainability, and preservation for public benefit.

The Natural Environment Board's four strategic priority areas are nature conservation and resilience, community engagement, access and recreation, and culture, heritage, and learning. Emily noted that detailed strategies have been shared with the group for further review.

Epping Forest's current management plan runs until 2030. However, the Committee have determined to bring that plan to an end early to ensure it aligns with the new strategic focus areas. As such, a new one-year business plan is being developed for 2024 and 2025, a five-year business plan will be created for each charity, detailing key deliverables and actions. Additionally, efforts are underway to standardise some policies and procedures across the Corporation and the Environment Department, where it makes sense to do so, ensuring a coordinated approach to achieving the Division's vision and strategic priorities.

Members emphasised the need for high-level strategies to be broken down to local applications, highlighting the significant effort put into their development. They stressed the importance of local buy-in and effective communication of these strategies to ensure unified direction.

There was interest in the Natural Capital Audit and a request for hard copies of documents for easier access and understanding. Members also inquired about the future format of documents, questioning if the natural environment strategies would be combined with business plans. Emily assured them that they are working on clear, readable five-year business plans that will link key actions to strategic and corporate plans.

The group sought clarification on the status of the four high-level priority documents. Ben explained that the Natural Environment Board's four strategies were overarching areas which all of the open spaces charities have signed up to, sharing common themes. However, each individual site or charity will may have some local nuances in their own strategies outside of this. Emily explained that the detailing actions and projects for Epping Forest will be embedded in the forthcoming management plans.

b) Natural Capital Audit – Emily Brennan

Emily provided an update on the Natural Capital Audit, emphasising its importance in demonstrating the value of open spaces. The audit was initiated to address the under-recognition of the services provided by these spaces, both internally and externally. It aimed to assign a monetary value to these services, covering aspects like biodiversity, air quality improvement and flood mitigation, amongst others.

The audit was conducted by consultants from Natural Capital Solutions, who evaluated the ecosystem services across 13 groups of sites, including City Gardens and the Cemetery and Crematorium. They mapped 11 different services, such as carbon storage, air purification, and recreation benefits. The report, completed in January, estimated the annual value of these benefits at £282.6 Million, with a total projected value of around £8 Billion over 50 years. Recreation and health benefits were identified as the largest contributors.

Key findings included the significant carbon sequestration value of Epping Forest, estimated at £4.5 Million annually. The report has generated positive press coverage and will be used to support income generation, influence governance and build effective partnerships. It provides a baseline for measuring progress and the potential to assess specific sites in detail.

Emily concluded by highlighting the audit's role in shaping future strategies and objectives, leveraging the data for partnership development and measuring success in delivering the Charity's vision and strategies. She invited questions from the group to further discuss the audit's implications and applications.

Group members and staff discussed its implications and future applications.

The group commended the audit, noting it enables effective communication with different departments using a shared language that highlights the value of the natural environment.

Ben Murphy emphasised the audit as a milestone that justifies the investment in natural spaces by demonstrating substantial public benefits and aiding in budget discussions.

Emily confirmed that the audit covered Buffer Lands and agreed to provide detailed data for Epping Forest, which would be useful for local discussions. She highlighted the need for a comprehensive Communications and Engagement Plan to maximise the report's impact.

There was interest in assessing the social capital value, acknowledging the contributions of various groups. Emily agreed that this could be explored further, suggesting a collective review to plan the next steps. The discussion underscored the audit's role in shaping future strategies and enhancing the understanding and appreciation of the Natural Environment's value.

c) Staffing update – Presentation – Jacqueline Eggleston

The organisational update presented by the Interim Assistant Director (Superintendent), highlighted significant changes and new appointments within the Natural Environment Division, which has replaced the former Open Spaces unit.

Bob Roberts was now the Interim Executive Director, having previously served as Director of Communications, while Emily continues her role as the Natural Environment Director. Leadership at key sites is maintained by Superintendents overseeing The Commons, Epping Forest and North London Open Spaces. Additionally, two new Assistant Director roles have been introduced: one for Culture and Projects, and another for Commercial and Charity, with Jo Hurst, formerly a Business Manager, stepping into the latter role to oversee charity reviews and various governance and commercial ventures.

Jacqueline serves as the Assistant Director (Superintendent) of Epping Forest, with Yve Woodhouse and Tristan Vetta sharing the responsibilities of the Interim Co-Heads of Business Development.

Laura Lawson continues as the Head of Operations. Recruitment is ongoing for a Conservation Manager to report to the new Head of Conservation and Forest Keeper roles, as well as new positions focused on digital content and volunteering.

A Sustainable Access Mitigation and Monitoring (SAMMS) team, funded by neighbouring local authorities, will work on infrastructure improvements and community engagement projects. Conservation and ecological efforts are bolstered by new hires, such as Tanith Cook, who will begin as Head of Conservation in April, along with roles in arborist management, grazing, and wildlife management.

Operational enhancements include expanding the Keeper team with additional Assistant Forest Keepers and Team Managers, introducing a new Regulatory Officer, and appointing an Estates Team Manager to improve enforcement and estate management. Efforts are underway to fill key vacancies to ensure operational efficiency and visibility on the ground. The Communications Team is also expanding, with new roles focused on digital content, engagement, and fundraising campaigns, aiming to enhance community interaction and support.

There was a discussion on the importance of terminology in job titles to attract applicants. It's noted that the term "Keepers" will continue to be used for staff, maintaining tradition and consistency. A member expressed interest in the voluntary assistance program and was assured that volunteers are being retained. Jacqueline explained that a new Engagement with Volunteering Officer role aims to expand and support the volunteer base with proper training, induction, and equipment.

The Group sought clarification on the uniform and roles, questioning how to differentiate between various staff members like Keepers, Rangers and Constables. Jacqueline confirmed that all such roles will be uniformly referred to as "Keepers" for simplicity and tradition. The discussion highlighted a need to balance traditional terminology with professional industry search terms to attract a diverse range of applicants.

Emily updated the group on the recruitment process for the permanent Superintendent. She mentioned that the application period had closed, they had a strong pool of applicants, and first interviews were underway. An announcement is expected by April/May.

The group discussed the timeline for stabilising the new structure, with concerns about needing a year to feel settled and properly assess progress. The challenge of the transition was acknowledged, but that significant strides in filling vacancies and moving towards a more organised and efficient operation was noted. There will be a substantial induction programme for about 40-50 new staff members, involving video overviews and joint visits around the Forest to ensure everyone is well-integrated.

Emily highlighted that the organisation is in a period of significant change, with efforts focused on supporting and training both new and existing staff. She plans to review the structure and make necessary adjustments, organising workshops for staff and members to provide feedback. This process will continue iteratively, addressing urgent issues as they arise and conducting a formal review in the summer.

Ben emphasised the positive impact of the staffing changes, noting that the headcount would increase by about 25%. He pointed out the importance of supporting existing staff to apply for newly created roles, which has avoided the need for redundancies. Going forward, there will be

more regular reporting on progress to keep the group informed and ensure alignment with the new strategies.

4. Operational Forward Plan

a) Management Plan Actions Update

Jacqueline outlined key performance indicators (KPIs) and current management actions. Car parking numbers remain steady, with a slight increase compared to the previous year. Licensing income, particularly from filming, is performing well, generating around £135,000. Golf revenue continues to grow annually. However, fly-tipping remains a significant issue, primarily involving household and builders' waste, costing nearly £4,000 per month for disposal. She assured that all waste is recycled properly. A member noted the significant issue of fly-tipping and its impact on the Forest.

Enforcement efforts since October include 54 investigations, covering fly-tipping, byelaw violations, and antisocial behaviour. Seven conditional cautions or fixed penalty notices totalling over £1,000 were issued and 30 ongoing investigations were handled, including one court summons for fly-tipping. Ongoing tree safety work is a priority, with surveys identifying numerous tasks, especially following recent storms. Another member asked for clarification on tree safety work and how storms have impacted ongoing efforts. Jacqueline explained that in-house surveys of green zones have been conducted since December, identifying many new tasks. An external Consultant is currently surveying red zones, covering highways and high-traffic areas. Recent storms, including Storms Garrett, Hank, Aisha, and Jocelyn, have caused delays as the Arborist Team has been focused on checking for storm damage and addressing immediate tree safety needs.

5. Engagement & Consultation

a) Epping Forest Consultative Group TORs

The discussion emphasised the need for the group to provide more feedback and set the agenda proactively. Jacqueline encouraged members to bring forward items for discussion, highlighting the importance of their input in shaping policies and strategies. The group discussed the value of having meetings in accessible locations, such as The Hope Centre, to facilitate public engagement. A member suggested returning to The Hope Centre for meetings due to its public transport accessibility. Ben explained there is a willingness to explore other venues, but that would come at an additional cost to the charity and would require online video functionality which many local venues cannot facilitate and would add a significant additional cost to hire in for 1 day. There was a general agreement on the need for more proactive input from group members.

b) Draft 2024/27 Business Plan

Jacqueline gave an update on the development of a five-year business plan, aimed at aligning with strategic priorities and corporate plans. The plan will include detailed actions and deliverables for Epping Forest and the Commons. She emphasised the importance of a clear, readable format and invited feedback on the draft template, which will be circulated for comments. A member asked if the business plan would be shared for feedback before finalisation. Jacqueline confirmed that a draft template would be circulated for review and input.

c) Access Report

The group discussed the access report, focusing on improving physical accessibility to Epping Forest. Jacqueline noted the importance of ensuring paths and trails are suitable for various user groups, including cyclists, horse riders, and walkers. The report also highlighted the need for better public transport access to certain entry points, such as Wanstead Park and addressed the challenges of maintaining paths in areas with environmental restrictions. A member raised concerns about access points at Wanstead Park and the need for better public transport connectivity. Another member emphasised the importance of considering different User Groups when planning path repairs. These points would be considered as part of the forthcoming Epping Forest Transport Strategy.

d) Project Updates

Jacqueline provided updates on several key projects:

Heronry Pond Reed bed Creation: Scheduled to begin in September, with funding from the City's Carbon Action Strategy and additional support from volunteer partners.

Wanstead Flats Park Life Project: Facing planning complexities, the team is exploring alternative options for maintaining grassroots football provisions which isn't being so heavily subsidised by the Epping Forest charity.

Path Repairs: Plans to address the most used paths post-COVID, with specific projects like the one at Higham's Park prioritised. A member asked about the timeline and specific plans for these repairs.

Countryside Stewardship Grant: The final submission was made in November, awaiting approval. There were questions about the status and funding of this grant.

Baldwin's Pond and Great Gregories: Contractors are lined up for work in early summer, focusing on dam repairs and overwintering facilities for our herd of cattle.

Volunteer Engagement: A recruitment campaign is underway for a new Volunteering and Engagement Officer, with plans to relaunch events. Concerns were raised about the communication and effectiveness of the Volunteer Engagement Strategy.

Charity Review: The City Corporation were conducting a review of its natural environment charities like Epping Forest to consider how they are set-up, manages and how they can enable Epping Forest to attract more external funding.

Partnerships: Ongoing participation in local and national environmental strategy boards, including the Essex and London local Nature Recovery Strategy Boards and a new Forest for the Nation initiative with Essex County Council.

Jacqueline emphasised the importance of these projects in achieving the City Corporation's strategic goals and improving the overall management and sustainability of Epping Forest.

The issue of nuisance quad bikes was also discussed, with Jacqueline explaining the collaborative efforts with local police and Epping Forest District were underway.

6. Volunteering event

Ben highlighted that the true value of volunteering in Epping Forest is not celebrated enough. The focus is on understanding volunteer activities, interests, and needs, as well as encouraging new members. He discussed plans for a rolling series of public volunteering events, starting with a community 'Lend a Hand' day next month. This event will showcase various activities in the Forest, such as visitor centre work, museum tours, and nature walks, followed by an informal reception to thank volunteers. Concerns were raised about effectively communicating these opportunities and recognising the contributions of volunteers. Ben assured that efforts are being made to improve engagement and support for volunteer groups.

The Group acknowledged the vital role of volunteers and the need for better coordination and publishing of volunteer opportunities to help amplify the voice of so many active volunteer groups across Epping Forest.

7. Any Other Business

Concerns were raised about the damage caused by cyclists, particularly in sensitive areas like the Loughton Camps / Iron Age Hill Forts. It was highlighted that cycling has become increasingly popular and is causing damage to some areas of the Forest, including soil compaction and root damage around ancient trees. The need for measures to prevent cycling in certain areas to protect the environment was emphasised.

Jacqueline acknowledged the issue and noted that cycling is causing damage to some areas of the Forest, especially with the increased popularity over the past decade. She mentioned the existing Cycling Strategy from 2020, which allowed for the restriction of cycling in specific areas. New signage prohibiting cycling in certain zones, like the Hill Forts, is ready to be installed, and targeted enforcement campaigns are planned for high-impact areas.

The discussion included points about distinguishing between responsible cyclists who stay on paths and those causing damage by cycling off-path. Group members expressed support for measures to manage and restrict cycling in sensitive areas, with a focus on balancing access for all visitors while protecting the Forest.

Susan Creevy raised the issue of planning applications that could potentially harm the Forest and requested a designated contact person for discussing residents' concerns. It was confirmed that Tristan Vetta, as Epping Forest's Land Agent, is the appropriate contact for such matters.

Tim Wright suggested having a detailed report on cycling and its management in the Forest for a future meeting. Jacqueline agreed to prioritise practical actions and review the Cycling Strategy, although a full review would take some time.

The meeting concluded with a reminder to submit any further questions or topics for future discussions.