

## **EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES**

**Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee      **Date:** Tuesday, 7 June 2016

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping      **Time:** 7.30 - 9.35 pm

**Members Present:** Councillors M Sartin (Chairman) L Girling (Vice-Chairman) N Avey, R Brookes, D Dorrell, S Kane, A Mitchell, S Murray, S Neville, A Patel, B Rolfe, G Shiell, D Stellan, B Surtees, H Whitbread and D Wixley

**Other Councillors:** Councillors R Baldwin, R Bassett, W Breare-Hall, A Grigg, H Kane, J Lea, G Mohindra, R Morgan, J Philip, C P Pond, C C Pond, S Stavrou, G Waller, C Whitbread, J H Whitehouse and J M Whitehouse

**Apologies:** Councillors N Bedford

**Officers Present:** S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager), A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer), M Jenkins (Democratic Services Officer) and T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer)

**By Invitation:** P Thomson (Epping Forest Conservators) and J Adams (Friends of Epping Forest)

---

### **1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

### **2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillor H Whitbread was substituting for Councillor N Bedford.

### **3. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 19 April 2016 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

(a) Councillor D Wixley declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item of the agenda by virtue of being a member of the Friends of Epping Forest. He advised that his interest was not prejudicial and he would remain in the meeting for the duration of the item and consideration thereon:

- Item 6 Management of Epping Forest

(b) Councillor S Murray declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item of the agenda by virtue of being a member of the Friends of Epping Forest. He

advised that his interest was not prejudicial and he would remain in the meeting for the duration of the item and consideration thereon:

- Item 6 Management of Epping Forest

## **5. MANAGEMENT OF EPPING FOREST**

The Committee received a presentation from Mr P Thomson, Superintendent of Epping Forest and Ms J Adams, Chairman of the Friends of Epping Forest on the Management Plan Consultation for Epping Forest.

The consultation Epping Forest – The Next 10 Years ran from June to October 2015 with 1,600 individuals being contacted and responses received from 432.

The consultation was broken down into 6 themes:

- (1) Public recreation and enjoyment.
- (2) Preservation of the natural aspect.
- (3) Protection of the unspoilt forest.
- (4) Regulation and management.
- (5) Heritage.
- (6) Deer management.

### **Consultation Responses**

#### **(a) Theme 1 – Public Recreation and Enjoyment**

##### **(i) Keeping cycling on track**

Responders felt that this issue was either important or very important. Although there was general support for cycling in the forest, there was concern amongst the Conservators of Epping Forest that forest land should not be relinquished for commuter cycling.

A further concern were the high speeds attained by cyclists, sometimes reaching 30 mph and riding at night.

##### **(ii) Keeping Trails in Working Order**

There were over 60 km of major paths which had cost £420,000 to maintain over the last 5 years. The consultation had revealed concerns on drainage with some people supporting more signage, although others had expressed concern with there being too much.

##### **(iii) An Exciting Natural Playground**

There had been 165 responses, it was felt that at the southern end of the forest, which was less dense, there could be an open space for a play area. It was acknowledged that there was a lack of play provision in the Woodford Green, Loughton and High Beech areas.

**(iv) Access for All**

Comments were made asking for less signage to minimise its visual impact in the Forest better maintenance of paths and car parks. Those responding wanted to strike a balance between wild forest and established trails.

**(v) A Safe Place for Visitors**

Respondents broadly agreed with all proposals with the exception of the take up membership for safety organisations such as visitor safety in the countryside. Other comments received focussed on provision of CCTV, increased Forest Keeper patrols, anti-social behaviour and drinking. There was also concern about rough sleepers using the forest as a bivouac.

**(b) Theme 2 – Preservation of the National Aspect****(i) Grasslands and Heathlands**

Respondents had broad agreement with all proposals the exception being the increased use of mechanical mowing of sites. Responses preferred grazing to mowing.

**(ii) Encouraging Commoner's Grazing Rights**

There were 108 responses with 30 comments, some concerned wooden fencing and its effects, a suggestion was to use invisible fencing.

**(c) Theme 3 – Protection of the Unspoilt Forest****(i) Managing Cars and Car Parks**

Respondents broadly disagreed with proposals concerning the introduction of fees and charges for car parking across the forest, reducing the number of car parks in the forest and introducing mobile or contactless payment for any car parking charges. A decision would be made in September 2016 on setting a small charge for car parking.

There was concern around the amount of traffic through the forest, it was felt that this should be discouraged.

**(ii) Planning and Protection**

Mr P Thompson said that the forest was facing real challenges in terms of planning development, they had been unhappy about recent decisions made. There was an opportunity for the forest to be designated as a World Heritage Site.

**(d) Theme 4 – Regulation and Management****(i) Litter**

Responses agree with improving litter management with a request for provision of more bins and improved education encouraging visitors to take their litter home.

**(ii) Fly-Tipping**

This was an area of big concern, there were 1½ occurrences of fly-tipping per day with a cost of between £6,000 – £7,000 to remove a single fly tip.

**(iii) Administering and Managing Licences**

It was advised that an income could be made from obtaining more permission for filming in the forest and the Corporation could increase the terms of leases for reinvestment.

**(e) Theme 5 – Heritage**

**(iv) Preserving Scheduled Ancient Monuments**

It was said that in some cases trees had damaged ancient monuments and needed cutting back. There were opportunities from land purchased for this to be returned to the Forest.

**(f) Theme 6 – Deer Management**

**(v) Minimising the Incidence of Deer-Vehicle Collisions**

There had been 162 incidents involving deers hit by vehicles last year. It was suggested that clear, wider verges were required and more signage to prevent this.

**Golden Threads**

The Corporation intended to promote equality duties, public involvement and volunteering. The consultation document would be published later in June 2016 and the Public Consultation on 6 themes to the summer of 2017.

Next, the Committee received a presentation from Ms J Adams regarding the Friends of Epping Forest.

The Friends had been in existence for 45 years and were the only group focused on the Forest as a whole and all its related interests. They were also the largest single voluntary membership organisation in the forest. The Friends participated in planning consultation, undertook guided walks, produced publications, operated a visitor centre and was involved in fundraising.

The Forest was open all year round and received 35,000 visitors from this district area alone.

The Friends had concerns about the Forest's future, which were summarised as follows:

- (1) Wood pasture restoration.
- (2) Cycling.
- (3) Litter
- (4) Development threatening the Forest.
- (5) Risk of the Forest losing its naturalness.

(6) Localism – a potential benefit but posed risks.

A particular concern was that the Forest could become a park in the future and lose its status as a natural forest/woodland.

The Chairman thanked the two speakers for their presentation and asked the Committee for their questions.

(a) Councillor S Murray extended his thanks to the Friends of Epping Forest for their work, they were completely voluntary with 1,600 members. As a Councillor, he added that the Forest was a gem which was the reason why many people lived in the district. The Councillor then asked Ms J Adams from the Friends of Epping Forest if they were concerned about the commercialisation of the Forest.

Ms J Adams replied that this was their biggest concern at the moment, she repeated her earlier concern that the Forest was not a park. Mr P Thomson added that £5 million was spent per annum in managing the Forest, he advised that the Forest had a long history of commercial activity and it should share in the profits from this activity.

Ms J Adams acknowledged that commercialism in the Forest had its place, there were 4.4 million visits there and resourcing would be necessary so that it was “fitter” for the next chapter in its progress.

(b) Councillor D Wixley asked about the Epping Forest Forum which he had attended in October/November 2015 could they be used again? In addition he asked about commuter cycling, he advised that it was possible to cycle quite some distance in the Forest, could proper routes be established going right through it?

Mr P Thomson said that there were 74 separate groups which had some interest in the Forest. In March 2016 it had been suggested that a consultative committee could be formed, they would be considering this again in July 2016.

Mr P Thomson replied to the second question by advising that a large consultation had been undertaken for commuter cycling on Wanstead Flats, however this was rejected. Commuter cycling could change the nature of the Forest, although the Corporation of London had released some land for this activity at Whipps Cross Road. Mr J Adams added that the Friends were interested in dedicated cycling routes and there had been a public petition.

(c) Councillor L Girling, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, asked about the Essex County Council Cycling Strategy. He advised that the Corporation was not mentioned as a consultee in the strategy, therefore what was their relationship with the County Council?

Mr P Thomson replied that the Corporation enjoyed a good working relationship with the County Council Highways, although they had a less successful relationship with the London Borough Highways. He confirmed that they had not been consulted on the County Cycling Strategy but added that the County had invested in the Forest.

(d) Councillor G Shiell referred to the online survey carried out by the Corporation on car parks.

Mr P Thompson replied that there were 11 responses and 38 comments made.

(e) Councillor R Brookes asked what progress had been made in establishing a Liaison Group of members of Epping Forest Commons Committee and Epping Forest District Council along the lines of those operating very successfully with the London Boroughs of Waltham Forest and Redbridge. It was now seven months since the proposal was put to the District Council.

Mr P Thompson replied that they had developed liaison groups with Members at the Commons and they had approached the District Council last year. The Cabinet were discussing a liaison group at the current time. The Chairman added that Cross Border Liaison Groups were a good means of liaison.

(f) Councillor S Neville asked about the Corporation's communication strategy as he had found it difficult to use their website.

Mr P Thomson replied that they get many hits on their website, particularly downloads of their forest map. The Corporation used Tweeter often, although there needed better signposting on their website to find the Forest section. He suggested as well, that better liaison was needed with parish councils.

(g) Councillor D Stallan asked about separating hospital visitors from Forest visitors in regard to car park usage. His second question concerned the deer issue and its impact on speed limits in the Forest.

Mr P Thomson replied that they had introduced a pilot scheme in regard to car parking, an hour and a half stay, on average, for forest users would favour them. It had been used successfully elsewhere. He acknowledged that there were a disproportionate number of deer incidents at the present time.

(h) Councillor D Stallan asked if the pilot scheme for parking was cheaper.

Mr P Thomson said the first two hours would be free and they would be issuing a season ticket. There would be a committee decision in September 2016.

(i) Councillor A Patel asked what support had the Corporation received from local authorities in talking crime and anti-social behaviour issues in the Forest? A second question he asked concerned what locations had the Corporation in mind for creating play areas.

Mr P Thomson replied that they had received support from the Metropolitan Police in regard to knife related crime and a dispersal zone had been established for 6 months. Essex Police had stopped a large party from starting in the forest, a Gypsy and traveller encampment had been moved from the Honey Lane area. The Corporation shared intelligence with police service all the time, which was improving over time.

In regard to sourcing play areas in the forest Waltham Forest Council had invested £30,000 into a play area. The Corporation had been asked to host an area in Wanstead as there was a play area deficit. However, he advised that this was a local authority responsibility. He added that it was good for children to play in a natural area and the corporation would try and find a way for the forest to do this.

(j) Councillor L Girling asked about the impact of cuts on the police, how did this impact the Corporation? He suggested as well that the forest car park needed gates at entry points.

Mr P Thompson said that they were undertaking day to day intelligence sharing, however police resources were often centred on towns particularly in the evenings, budget cuts were also a problem.

In response to the second question, less than a quarter of car parks in the forest had gated entrances. Not all users welcomed them although they helped in cutting down anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping.

(k) Councillor L Girling asked if the Corporation was liaising with the District Council on fly-tipping, was there a pattern in the dumping of rubbish?

Mr P Thomson replied that they were trying to allocate reference numbers to each fly-tip incident.

(l) Councillor A Mitchell expressed concern at the speed of cyclists going through the forest, sometimes attaining speeds of 30mph.

Mr P Thomson said that they had 1 or 2 senior keepers and 10 forest keepers, they had staff on call for problems. The Corporation tried to build a Code of Conduct and were developing communication with user groups. Improvement on sight lines in the forest may help.

(m) Councillor B Surtees asked Ms J Adams from the Friends of Epping Forest what she thought the forest would look like in 30 years.

Ms J Adams replied that the future really depended on the next 5 years, she did have concerns about the forest's future.

The Chairman asked non-committee members for their questions.

(n) Councillor S Stavrou asked about the charging scheme for horse riders in the forest. Users paid for the individual rider and their horse through a licence. She thought the process convoluted.

She made a second point concerning a recent experience she had when she discovered an injured Muntjac which had a broken hind leg. She reported the matter to the forest authorities only to be given conflicting information, there needed to be a more direct reporting route for these incidents.

Mr P Thomson advised that the animal concerned had been dispatched by the authorities. He commented on the horse licences saying that it took a decade to negotiate and install the current charging regime. It would need altering bye-laws and a lot of administration to change this.

(o) Councillor J M Whitehouse asked about the future of the deer sanctuary.

Mr P Thomson advised that the sanctuary was owned by the Corporation and there could be more opportunities to see the deer and generate interaction.

Mr P Thomson answered a final question regarding the concentration of services in the forest near car parks. He said that it was in these areas that visitors gathered. There needed to be a mix of quiet forest areas and busier areas where services could be located.

The Chairman thanked Mr P Thomson and Ms J Adams for their presentations and providing answers to Member's questions.

## **6. KEY DECISION LIST - REVIEW**

The Committee received the Cabinet's Key Decision List for review from the Democratic Services Manager.

There was a legal requirement for local authorities to publish a notice in respect of each Key decision that it proposed to make, at least 28 days before that decision was made. The Committee were invited to identify any particular issues which were of concern. Members noted that the cabinet were considering a feasibility study for the re-development of the site at Norway House, North Weald. The Housing Portfolio Holder replied that a response to this would be issued in due course.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the current Key Decision List be noted.

## **7. OUTTURN REPORT ON KEY OBJECTIVES 2015/16**

The Committee received a report from the Democratic Services Officer regarding the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan 2015/16 – Quarter 4 (Outturn) position.

The Corporate Plan 2015-2020 was the Council's highest level strategic planning document. It set the strategic direction for the authority for the five year lifetime of the Plan. It focused on a number of key areas that the Council needed to concentrate on during that time and helped prioritise resources to provide quality services and value for money.

These key areas were known as the Corporate Aims and were supported by a set of Key Objectives representing the Council's high level initiatives and goods to achieve these aims. These objectives were delivered via an annual Key Action Plan. The Key Action Plan 2015/16 was made up of action and deliverables designed to secure progress against each of the Key Objectives 2015/16. Annual action plans would be developed which built on progress achieved during preceding years.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Outturn Report on Key Objectives 2015/16 be noted.

## **8. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16**

The Committee received the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2015/16 from the Democratic Services Manager.

Further to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 April 2016, the annual report had been amended incorporating comments made by the committee at



that meeting. Members were asked to agree the report for referral to the full Council for its 26 July 2016 meeting.

Councillor S Neville advised that in regard to the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Select Committee case study, paragraph (xii) PICK Form on 20 mph Speed Limit, there should be a correction, as he felt that the current policy for consideration of 20mph limits on local roads would be considered by a Cabinet member if the mean speed was 21 – 29 mph. Officers said they would re-examine this.

The Committee also extended its gratitude to the former Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor R Morgan, for his work and commitment over the years with this committee.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report for 2015-16 be recommended to the Full Council for its meeting on 26 July 2016.

**9. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERSHIP TO SELECT COMMITTEE**

The Committee received a report from the Democratic Services Manager regarding membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committees 2016/17.

The Overview and Scrutiny framework was currently based on a structure of four select committees and had been established at the start of the last municipal year.

Article 6 of the Council's Constitution required that the Committee determined the number of select committees and reviewed them. In addition, the membership of the select committees was to be appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the first meeting each year, as such appointments were reserved to the Committee and not made by the Council. As a result of the change in the political make-up of the Council arising from the recent local elections there were a number of options available to achieve the pro-rata membership requirements of the Constitution for the select committees for 2016/17.

It was advised that the UKIP Group would nominate one Councillor for membership of the Governance Select Committee but were not proposing membership of other committees. The Conservative Group were nominating two members for the Governance Select Committee as well.

A vote was taken on the Chairmanship for the Communities Select Committee, Councillor S Murray (Independent) was proposed and defeated. Councillor Y Knight (Conservative Group) was proposed and agreed. Therefore Councillor Y Knight became Chairman of the Communities Select Committee.

The Committee subsequently thanked Councillor S Murray for his work chairing the former Housing Select Committee and his assistance to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That, in order to reflect pro rata and achieve the cross party rules of the Council's Constitution, each of the select committees comprise 15 members for 2016/17;
- (2) That, the relinquishment of the entitlement of the UKIP Group to a seat on the Communities Select Committee and the Neighbourhoods Select

Committee for 2016/17 be noted and that these seats be offered to independent members for the year;

- (3) That, the appointments to the select committees annexed to these minutes be adopted; and
- (4) That, appointments be made to the position of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of each select committee for 2016/17, as set out in the appendix to these minutes.

#### **10. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING**

The Committee considered the current updated Overview and Scrutiny work programme. The Chairman suggested that a separate meeting be arranged for all Chair and Vice-Chair of scrutiny select committees to meet and discuss their work programmes, this invite was also extended to any member of the authority. A bulletin item would draw all member's attention to this proposal. The Democratic Services Manager advised that the first cycle of select committee meetings could draw out the priorities before this special meeting gathered.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That officers arrange a special meeting to be held of all Chair and Vice-Chair of scrutiny select committees to discuss this year's work programmes as soon as possible;
- (2) That a Council Bulletin item be published advising members of this meeting and inviting them to attend.

**CHAIRMAN**

**Communities Select Committee**

**Chairman:** Y Knight

**Vice-Chairman:** G Shiell

**Conservative Group:** K Chana, R Gadsby, L Hughes, S Jones, Y Knight, A Mitchell, B Rolfe, G Shiell and H Whitbread

**Green Party Group:** S. Heap

**Liberal Democrat Group:** B. Surtees

**Loughton Residents Association Group:** A. Beales, L. Girling

**UKIP Group:** No nominations

**Independent Members:** S Murray

**Governance Select Committee**

**Chairman:** N Avey

**Vice-Chairman:** G Chambers

**Conservative Group:** N Avey, G Chambers, L Hughes, S Jones, S Kane, M McEwen, B Rolfe, H Whitbread and D Stallan

**Green Party Group:** No nominations

**Liberal Democrat Group:** B. Surtees

**Loughton Residents Association Group:** H. Kauffman, D. Wixley

**UKIP Group:** D Dorrell

**Independent Members:** No nominations

**Neighbourhoods Select Committee**

**Chairman:** N Bedford

**Vice-Chairman:** H Brady

**Conservative Group:** N Avey, N Bedford, H Brady, L Hughes, A Patel, B Rolfe, M Sartin, G Shiell and L Webster

**Green Party Group:** S. Neville

**Liberal Democrat Group:** J. H. Whitehouse

**Loughton Residents Association Group:** J. Jennings, R. Baldwin and C P Pond

**UKIP Group:** No nomination

**Independent Members:** R Morgan

#### **Resources Select Committee**

**Chairman:** S Kane

**Vice-Chairman:** A Patel

**Conservative Group:** N Bedford, A Boyce, S Kane, P Keska, A Mitchell, A Patel and H Whitbread

**Green Party Group:** No nomination

**Liberal Democrat Group:** J. M. Whitehouse

**Loughton Residents Association Group:** R Jennings, C. Roberts, D. Roberts

**UKIP Group:** D. Dorrell

**Independent Members:** No nominations