



Engaging People with Epping Forest



Epping Forest Centenary Trust Strategic Plan 2009- 2011

15 April 2009

Charity number 275076

Registration No 1339783

www.efct.info

Contents

Foreword

- 1 Aim of the plan
2. About us
3. Challenges and opportunities
4. Our vision and aims
5. Our programmes of work
6. Making the plan happen
7. Key risks
- 8 The future

Appendices

- Appendix A History of the Epping Forest Centenary Trust
- Appendix B Our partners and supporters
- Appendix C Action Plan for 2009

Our Vision

Our vision is to inspire people, particularly young people, to understand, enjoy and value Epping Forest and appreciate the many values of trees, woodlands and forest products.

Foreword

The development of this plan has provided the opportunity to examine our past achievements and look to the future. During 2008, we celebrated our thirtieth year and this further encouraged us to review our activities and give consideration to our future.

The increased collaboration with other partners, who provide learning experiences in the Forest, particularly for young people, has also contributed to our thinking. Some of this work arose through the development of the City of London's application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, providing us with a timely contribution.

In addition, our changing and developing Board membership, along with the more recent economic climate have also been drivers for this review.

We are now clearer about our unique contribution in enabling people better to appreciate, understand and enjoy the Forest. For our Associate Members, Epping Forest has added to their lives, bringing enjoyment and enhancing well being and they want to ensure that a wider community is able to benefit too.

Our vision is to inspire people, particularly young people, to understand, enjoy and value Epping Forest and appreciate the many values of trees, woodlands and forest products. Not only will this bring benefit to people's lives, it will encourage them to play their part in ensuring the Forest survives for many generations ahead.

1 Aim of the Plan

This plan describes our work, the challenges facing us and outlines where we will focus our efforts over the next three years to achieve our vision. It was developed by the Board and staff members, through workshops and discussion, and was assisted by contributions from our members, volunteers and users.

2 About us

2.1 Background

Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT) was founded by Alfred Quist, retiring Superintendent of Epping Forest, with Sir William Addison, Sir Arthur Noble, Bernard Ward and Terence Mallinson in 1978. That year marked one hundred years, since the passing of the Epping Forest Act of 1878. This Act, promoted by the City of London, restored lost lands to the Forest and secured its future and protection as a public open space. Since that time, Epping Forest has been under the guardianship of the Conservators of Epping Forest (City of London). The formation of this charity was in recognition of one hundred years of wise forest management and the need to interpret and present its story and values to a wider public.

It is now a registered charity (275056) and a company limited by guarantee (Registration No 1339783), whose objects are:

To support, for the benefit of the public, measures for the conservation of the natural aspect, features and animal and plant life of Epping Forest.

To promote, arrange, organise and conduct, for the benefit of the public,

a) the advancement of the future education and training of young people in voluntary work and social service and similar activities for the benefit of the community through practical schemes and projects directed towards the conservation of Epping Forest

b) research directed towards the conservation of Epping Forest and the publication of the useful results thereof

c) schemes and projects for the continuing development of Epping Forest or part of it as a facility for public recreation or other leisure time occupation within the meaning of the Recreational Charities Act 1958.

2.2 Our history

The focus of our activities has varied over the years, depending on need and opportunity. In our early years, our work was to increase awareness of Epping Forest, through displays, exhibitions and publications.

Later, as the Conservators undertook more of this work, we developed a Conservation

Project managed by a Project Officer. This Project supports the conservation of some of the smaller and more sensitive areas of the Forest, for example, at Warren Hill.

In 1992, the Forest Education Initiative (FEI) was established in Epping Forest, and that programme was then launched nationally in 1994 by the Trust, supported by The Forestry Commission, The Field Studies Council and Professor David Bellamy. EFCT contributes to and is affiliated to the Forest Education Initiative (www.foresteducation.org.uk) in its work in England, Scotland and Wales. A major role of the FEI is to establish and support the Forest School programmes which bring groups of children of varying ages and abilities to undertake discovery activities in safe woodland settings. The key aim of Forest School is to develop children's self esteem through regular contact with a woodland environment and challenging yet achievable activities.

The Environmental Awareness Officer is a trained Forest School Leader and works with schools to run Forest Schools, find suitable sites and promote and support schools to develop Forest Schools. Several have been established and others will develop, working with teachers and local education authorities.

In 1999, the Environmental Awareness Project was initiated, and a second Project Officer was recruited. The Environmental Awareness Project supported 1,737 child visits in the first year, developing programmes to engage children's groups in activities that raise their awareness and appreciation of Epping Forest.

A more extensive history of our work is at Appendix A.

2.3 Current activities

The Trust offices are based at the Warren, Loughton, the headquarter offices of the Conservators of Epping Forest, but the vast majority of our work with groups is based in the Forest. Most of the groups we work with come from the area local to the Forest; namely, East London and the surrounding areas of Essex. We promote the Forest as a place to visit and we hope that visiting the Forest with us encourages groups and individuals to come to the Forest again and again.

'The best classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky'

Currently we promote access, understanding and interest in Epping Forest through the awareness and conservation programmes for a variety of adults and young people's groups including schools, special needs groups, scouting organisations, volunteer groups, community groups, out of school clubs and youth clubs. There is a wide ethnic diversity of the young people attending the programmes, aligned with the communities of East London, who are our main catchment. Our website describes the programmes in more detail (www.efct.info).

The Awareness Programme has been particularly developed for young people, mostly of primary school age.

The Conservation Programme is carried out principally by children of secondary school age and adults. Some of the 'open' conservation events (such as Forest Hands) encourage

family participation. The Trust also worked with local Scout Groups to establish and organise “Scout Project 800,” a major conservation project, celebrating the 800th year of the Mayoralty of the City of London (1989). Scouts from all over the UK now take part in a week long annual conservation programme throughout the Forest. This project is still going strong nearly 20 years later and the Scouts make a vital contribution to the conservation of Epping Forest.

For all of our programmes, we record the nature of the participant group, the community from which the group comes and the ethnicity, gender and age of the children and young people who take part.

A summary of our participants is at Appendix B.

To deliver our programme, the Trust works with many partners and supporters. The Trust was set up with the full support of the City of London Corporation, which continues to provide the Trust with office accommodation and storage facilities at the Warren. The Trust is also a partner with the City of London in the education module of their Heritage Lottery Fund bid and works closely with the Conservators of Epping Forest in agreeing sites and tasks for our conservation work.

The Trust also works with the Field Studies Council (who manages Epping Forest Field Centre at High Beach) on a number of projects, including the ‘Winter Wonderland’ event in December.

The Trust currently has an asset base of a little over £300,000 from which it derives income. It also receives donations and grants from individuals and organisations, along with its Associate Members.

3 Challenges and Opportunities

The challenges and opportunities are considerable. We considered our strengths and weaknesses and also reviewed our contribution to learning activities in the Forest, against those of other providers in the Forest, including Suntrap, Field Studies Council, BTCV and the Friends of Epping Forest. Each has its own following and funding support, though there are a number of shared stakeholders and individual members.

Key strengths

Staff - Over the 30 years of the existence of the Trust, all project officers have been graduates in environmental studies or in similar degree courses. Their initiative and leadership of the young people who learn and work with them in Epping Forest has been essential and outstanding. Administration support is provided by a part time Administrator.

Relationship with the Conservators - All the conservation work of the Trust is agreed with the Superintendent of Epping Forest, who contributes his support and the support of his staff.

Ability to be responsive, with programmes and audiences - The small size of the Trust and the skills of its staff have enabled it to be very responsive to the needs and interests of various groups, including schools and families from the local community.

Charitable status - As a charity, donations to the Trust are eligible for Gift Aid, providing a tax benefit to the Trust and potentially to the donor. In addition, its charitable status opens up a number of grant funding opportunities.

Our unique activities - Some areas of work provided by the Trust are unique in the Forest, including Forest Hands (conservation volunteering for families) , Forest Schools, our work with very young, nursery age children and our specialist conservation work for Epping Forest carried out for and with the Conservators.

Several long term and committed volunteers - The Trust has the support of a number of volunteers, who substantially increase the work the Trust can undertake. They largely support the Project staff and include teachers, experienced group leaders, individuals knowledgeable about plant and wildlife and people willing to participate in conservation work.

Diversity of our participants – The results of our participant monitoring show that our participants reflect the high diversity of the communities within areas local to the Forest.

Improved management and governance - In past few years, the Trust has widened the skill base of the Trustee Board, bringing on board people with specialist skills of charity operations and management, charity accountancy, the law, education and school management to become Trustees. The recent development of our policies and our operation has made us more able to grow and develop.

Our Associate Membership - The Constitution of the Trust, under its Trust Deed, provides for an Associate Membership, which was established to encourage local residents to support the work of the Trust and to take part in its outdoor activities. Whilst the number of Associate Members is currently quite low (and hence a weakness), they represent a body of people committed to the Trust and its work.

Our improved Web site -This has recently been redeveloped, giving it better capacity to promote Trust events and our newsletter “Trust in the Forest.”

Weaknesses

Declining endowment funds - The initial fund raising campaign was a considerable success. Subsequent bequests from members and Associate Members over the years, along with an increase in investment values, allowed the fund to grow. However, as our work also grew over that period (including the employment of staff), this led to a continuing reduction in income and capital investments. The recent decline in stock market values has contributed to this reduction. At present levels of annual expenditure, without new funds, the work of the Trust will have to be greatly curtailed within a very few years.

Dependence on primarily one funding source – Our main funding source at present is endowment funds. Diversification of funding sources will be essential for the future.

Our low profile - While some promotional work has taken place, the Trust has not publicised its work regularly in local newspapers nor has been able to make regular contributions to education and school newsletters, the Conservators or radio, for example.

Limited understanding of our role by partners – This is linked to the previous weaknesses. It is evident that the partners in the Forest have had a limited understanding of what we do and how we are resourced. Collaboration over the Heritage Lottery Fund project is helping to address this.

Our small staff numbers- Our limited staff numbers make us more vulnerable in terms of service delivery.

Opportunities

Good existing partners and considerable potential for new partners – Currently, the Scouts and other Forest providers including the Field Studies Council, Suntrap and the City of London along with the many schools and groups who take part are valuable partners. These and new partners give us a wealth of opportunities for the future.

Epping Forest itself – is a very special resource and near to London.

Grant aid and funding – The nature of our work, with local communities, children and young people encouraging outdoor learning is part of the current agenda of educationalists and Government, indicating that a well directed development programme should be able to attract significant funding.

Our current and future participants- Our current participants have substantially contributed to the development of our current programmes and continue to provide opportunities for our future development, along with new participants.

Forest Schools - The Trust's association with The Forest Education Initiative also provides further opportunities for their development.

Threats

Competition -for both the limited grants and funding resources currently available and in terms of our niche in the Forest.

Our unique strengths

In summary, in comparison with the other providers in the Forest, our activities are special in a number of ways:

- a) Our non Curriculum work with schools and groups, focusing much more on personal development and experiences

This includes our work with Early Years children, our conservation work with colleges

under the 'Steps to Independence' programme and work experience for school pupils.

- b) Our development and management of Forest Schools
- c) Our extensive work with groups with special needs
- d) Our conservation work with communities local to the Forest, including our work with families

4 Our vision and aims

Our Vision

Our vision is to inspire people, particularly young people, to understand, enjoy and value Epping Forest and appreciate the many values of trees, woodlands and forest products.

Our main operational aims

1: To involve people in 'hands on' activities in the Forest, supporting the conservation of the Forest

2: To increase understanding, appreciation and use of the Forest

These are underpinned by the following aims.

3: To increase, develop and support the membership of Epping Forest Centenary Trust

4: To raise our profile

5: To work towards a more sustainable financial and business model, raising resources, commensurate with the needs of the organisation

6: To work towards excellence in governance and management

5 Our Programmes of work

TO deliver our operational aims; namely, 'To involve people in 'hands on' activities in the Forest, supporting the conservation of the Forest' and: 'To increase understanding, appreciation and use of the Forest', we have developed a number of programme areas (groupings of activities).

For each of these, we have identified the audience, the overall aim, listed a few current activities and highlighted the priority area/s for development.

For some of the programmes, more detail has been developed, including particular aims for a specific audience segment. These have not been included here, as each will require adapting to better match particular funding or partner opportunities.

Programme 1: Encouraging and facilitating access for all

Aim: To encourage organisations and individuals, particularly those with special needs, to make regular use of the Epping Forest

Audience: Special Needs Groups, including Special Needs Schools, both primary and secondary, Colleges, Community groups and Care homes

Sample of current activities include:

Open Access Days, Awareness Visits, Conservation Groups- undertaking access projects, Winter Wonderland, Forest Schools

In the next three years:

Develop and extend our services for groups with special needs

Programme 2: Understanding and taking action to conserve the habitats and species of the Forest

Aim: To introduce groups and individuals from different, and especially mixed cultural backgrounds to the Forest and involve them in its conservation

Audience: ESOL, including Extended school communities, Forest Community Groups, Colleges

Sample of current activities include:

Scout Project, Forest Hands, and Conservation projects

In the next three years:

Develop and extend our conservation programme, particularly focussing on providing opportunities both for colleges supporting newcomers to Britain and for families

Programme 3: Understanding and appreciating the Forest as a place to work and play together

Aim: To encourage individuals, families and local communities to make effective use of the Forest as a place for playing and learning together

Audience: Local Families, Youth Groups, Local Communities and Individuals

Sample of current activities include:

Conservation Projects, Forest Hands, Craft Events

In the next three years:

Develop our activities for families and with local communities

Programme 4: Developing and Facilitating Forest Schools

Aim: To promote the establishment and development of Forest School groups using Epping Forest to develop young people's skills and, self esteem and for the older children, to identify the opportunities of careers in forestry and the wood trades and industries

Audience: Key Volunteers (from schools or local groups) local schools and organisations.

Sample of current activities include:

Training leaders, Promotion of Forest Schools, Facilitating School visits, visits to local forestry and wood processing operations

In the next three years:

Increase the number of Forest Schools operating in and around Epping Forest

Programme 5: Awakening Children to the magic of the Forest

Aim: To introduce young children from urban and deprived backgrounds to the magic of Epping Forest and promote lifelong use of the Forest

Audience: Early years

Sample activities:

Awareness visits, usually over a three to six week programme

In the next three years:

Extend our programme for early years children

6 Making the plan happen

In order to deliver our vision and our operational aims as outlined above, activities to deliver the underpinning aims will be crucial. These are summarised here.

To increase, develop and support the membership of Epping Forest Centenary Trust

We will continue to support our Associate Membership and look to encourage new members to join. This will require ongoing production of our newsletter, a revamping of our AGM to attract more participants, a review of our subscriptions rates and increased promotion.

To raise our profile

This plan will be launched later in 2009 and our communications (membership leaflet, website) will be updated to take on board the developments in this plan.

We will also seek to increase our press coverage locally, working to get coverage for each major activity and to have an article in the local newspapers of each of our constituency areas.

To work towards a more sustainable financial and business model, securing resources, commensurate with the needs of the organisation

In the short term, we shall review our subscription rates and also our charging policy for services. In addition, we shall prepare grant aid applications and project proposals for charitable trusts. This will involve developing a project approach to our work and we will seek to cover our annual operational costs by external funding by year three of this plan.

To work towards excellence in governance and management

We shall continue to maintain regular Board meetings and Management Group meetings, to support and monitor this plan. We shall continue to meet the requirements of Companies House and the Charity Commission. We shall continue to prepare, approve and monitor our budget and the success of our fundraising plan.

Operationally, we will continue to ensure that health and safety remains a prime consideration and that our work with children and vulnerable adults meets the highest standards.

In addition, we will ensure that our staff are developed to meet the needs of the plan.

7 Risks

The key risks to the Trust are a failure to secure additional funding, loss of staff and a major accident or incident, which might cause reputational damage to the Trust.

Our aspirations for excellence in governance and management will seek to mitigate these risks, along with our work to secure a more sustainable financial and business model.

8 The future

The Trust is very grateful for all the support it has received during the past thirty years, from participants, donors, Associate members and the many partners with whom we have worked.

We look forward to their continuing support to ensure the ongoing development of the Trust, enabling us 'to inspire people, particularly young people to understand, enjoy and value Epping Forest.'

Appendix A HISTORY OF EPPING FOREST CENTENARY TRUST

1978-2008

In 1978, Epping Forest Centenary Trust was founded by Alfred Quist, retiring Superintendent of Epping Forest, with Sir William Addison, Sir Arthur Noble, Bernard Ward and Terence Mallinson.

The Story of Epping Forest

One of the first actions of the newly formed Trust was the purchase and creation of The Mobile Information Unit, a drivable display, showcasing the history, flora and fauna of The Forest. The Mobile Information Unit was present at events throughout London and Essex until 1984 and during The Lord Mayors' Shows.

Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge

The following year work on restoration and an exhibition for Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge started with fundraising for this project. This work continued in **1980 and in 1981**, and the restored building and the new historical and ecological exhibitions were opened by The Lord Mayor and Sheriffs.

The Banquet and Pageant

In 1980 the Trustees continued their drive to raise funds and awareness of the Trust by holding a Banquet and pageant and with competitions for school children about the Forest, at the Porter Tun Room in The City of London, for 485 supporters, local and from The City, in the presence of HRH The Duke of Gloucester, The Lord Mayor and Sheriffs.

A Map of the Forest and Exhibitions

In the early 1980's the Trust published a number of leaflets about the Forest, its ecology and history. The Trust also published a comprehensive walker's map of Epping **Forest**. Also in the early 1980's the Trust ran a number of high profile competitions and exhibitions to promote awareness of the Forest in the area. These events included a photographic exhibition in Covent Garden and in Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge.

The Conservation Project

In 1984 the Corporation of London took over the information function of the Trust. In response, the Trust developed a Conservation Project and appointed a Conservation Project Officer. The Conservation Project worked with nine schools over the course of a year, on projects including pond clearance and removal of non-indigenous plant and tree species. In **1986** His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, "Ranger of Epping Forest", visited the Conservation Project. The Conservation project was further boosted in the same year by the donation of Lawrence of Arabia's Hut in Epping Forest, which was moved and converted into a training room for groups working with the Trust.

The first Wheel Chair Path

Over a period of **3 years from 1986 to 1989** the Trust initiated, funded and built the Wheel Chair Path at High Beach. This is still a major attraction to the Forest, with thousands of people making use of the path every year, enabling everyone to experience the benefits of the Forest, regardless of their abilities.

Celebrating 800 Years. The Scouts at work in The Forest

In 1989 the Trust was involved in the setting up of the "Scout Project 800," a major conservation

project, celebrating the 800th year of the Mayoralty of the City of London. Scouts from all over the UK took part in conservation projects throughout the Forest. This project is still going strong nearly 20 years later and the Scout's make a vital contribution to the conservation of Epping Forest, which has included the construction of a second wheel chair path around Connaught Water.

The launch of The Forest Education Initiative, a National programme

In 1992 the Forest Education Initiative (FEI) was established in Epping Forest, and that programme was then launched nationally **in 1994** by the Trust, with Professor David Bellamy. Since then, the FEI, with similar aims to those of The Trust, has grown to over 75 Cluster Groups of the forest industry and environmental education formed throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

Winter Wonderland

In 1996 the Trust began Winter Wonderland Week—an annual programme, run in collaboration with the Field Studies Council, to provide free of charge opportunities for groups with special needs to visit the Forest and take part in activities. The project has continued since 1996 and, each year, about 120 children with special needs take part.

The Environmental Awareness Project

In 1999 The Epping Forest Centenary Trust Environmental Awareness Project was initiated, and the second Project Officer was recruited. The Environmental Awareness Project worked with 1,737 child visits in the first year, developing programmes to engage children's groups in activities that raise their awareness and appreciation of Epping Forest.

The Wildlife Refuge

In 2005 the Trust began the North Farm Wildlife Refuge project—to turn an area of agricultural land, surrounded by housing estates, into a number of different habitats through the work of young people. The Trust planted over 1,500 trees to create an area of coppice woodland and native hedgerow. This site is now open to the public and is very well used by the local residents.

The International Scout Jamboree

In 2007, the Trust had an exceptionally busy year with many new groups working with the Trust and the International Scout Jamboree brought 324 Scouts from around the world to work on the Trust Conservation Project. The Trust also adopted the '**Forest Schools' National programme**, monitored by The Forest Education Initiative, with the first groups from local schools working in Wanstead Park.

From the year 2000, the numbers of groups and participants in Trust projects continually increased—*by 2007* the number of visits to the Environmental Awareness Project had increased to 4,091 and the number for the Conservation Project reached 1,069. *Almost half of all participants come from ethnic minority families and 20% of participants have special needs. The Trust Project Officers are trained in first aid, all the requirements of Health & Safety and Risk Assessment and are qualified drivers of the Trust's two Mini Buses.*

In 2008 Epping Forest Centenary Trust celebrated 30 years working to achieve its Aims.

Appendix B Our partners and supporters

Aldersbrook, Primary School, Wanstead
Alderton Junior School, Loughton
Amwell View School
Awards for All
Barclays
Bramble Close Care Home
Bridge House Estates
Central Foundation Girls School, Mile End
Charles French Trust
Chapel End Early Years Centre, Walthamstow
Cherry Trees School
Chingford Brownies
Chingford C of E Junior School
Colegrave Primary School, Stratford
Ellingham Project
Epping Forest District Council
Epping Forest Scout Fellowship
Epping Infants School
Fairbridge Project, Hackney
Forest Education Initiative
Forest Glade Residents Association
Grange Farm Centre Trust
Hackney City Academy
Hackney Cubs
Hertfordshire Regional College
Jack Petchey Foundation
Joseph Sully Foundation
Littleheath School
Local Network Fund Newham
Low Hall Nursery, Walthamstow
Manorfield Primary School, Tower Hamlets
Markhouse
Oakhill Primary School, Woodford Green
Oaklands School, Loughton
Ravensbourne School, Essex
Ray Lodge Neighbours Club
Redbridge College
Redlands Primary School. Tower Hamlets
Ronald Openshaw Nursery Education Centre, Stratford
Staples Road Infant School, Loughton
Stepney Children's Project
Stepney Greencoat School
Steps to Independence – Epping Forest College
Γ The Augustine Courtauld Trust
The City Parochial Foundation
The Mercers Company

United Friends, Redbridge
Waltham Abbey Scouts
Waltham Forest Mencap
Whitefield School
Woodford County High School
Worth Limited, Waltham Forest