

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	20 05 2019
Subject: Proposed Honey Lane (A121) Pedestrian Crossing Point – Adjacent Woodgreen Road/Forest Side junction (SEF 16/19)	Public
Report of: Colin Buttery. Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
Report author: Paul Thomson - Superintendent of Epping Forest	

Summary

Your Committee of November 2008 adopted the Epping Forest Transport Strategy in partnership with Essex County Council. One of the Policy's five guiding principles was support for the installation of safe crossing points on major roads, both in and surrounding the Forest, to facilitate improved pedestrian, cycle and equestrian access through an otherwise truncated Forest. This report is necessary to consider a request by residents, and their Ward County Councillor, through the Epping Forest Local Highways Panel, for a safe crossing point across Honey Lane (A121). The proposal involves the construction of a crossing island and the dedication of 50.9m² (0.12 acres) of Forest Land to facilitate the road widening splays required to accommodate the island.

Essex County Council have indicated that a crossing island is the most appropriate and cost-effective traffic intervention in the Honey Lane 40mph zone which currently has a low road accident record. The Highway Authority has further indicated that it would not offer compensatory land under the City Corporation's Epping Forest Land Retention Policy. During initial negotiations, your Officers have stated a preference for a signalised 'Pegasus' Crossing, which would require an associated speed restriction to 30mph, and avoid the need to dedicate Forest Land. The proposal has also been overshadowed by outline proposals in the Epping Forest District Council Local Plan, that is currently before an Inspector, which proposes the use of Forest Land to create an HGV 'crawler lane' on Honey Lane/Woodriven Hill, which any crossing island road widening scheme may be seen to facilitate.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to approve:

- i. A clear position that the City Corporation will not consider any further dedication until the land exchange, outstanding since September 2011, for the traffic safety scheme at High Beach is completed.

- ii. A negotiating position requesting the reduction in speed restrictions on Honey Lane from 40mph to 30mph and the installation, with Essex County Council Cabinet Member special approval, of a signalised 'Pegasus' Crossing with the dedication of 10m² of Forest Land to facilitate the installation of appropriate tactile paving.
- iii. Should the Highway Authority continue to propose crossing islands and is unable to offer compensatory land already in their ownership contiguous with Forest boundaries, Officers should indicate that Committee would offer the purchase, subject to valuation by the District Valuer, and dedication of Buffer Land as Forest Land as a suitable exchange.

Main Report

Background

1. Honey Lane was first noted as a public highway in 1408 serving as an important east/west route between Cheshunt and Woodford . Following classification as the A121 in 1922/23, the route linked the A10 at Waltham Cross with the A11 in Epping Forest. The A121 achieved greater prominence as a feeder to Junction 26 following the construction of the M25 in 1986. The A121 Cheshunt Link Road, which was opened in 1996, acts as a southern bypass for Waltham Abbey. Currently, the A121 carries 26,000 vehicle movements/day at Honey Lane.
2. Your Committee approved the Forest Transport Strategy (FTS) as policy in May 2009 (SEF 13/09) to manage the impact of public highways on the Forest, in partnership with Essex County Council (ECC). The FTS proposals fall into 5 guiding principles which include:
 - Site Accessibility and Road Safety – Crossing Islands – proposed at key locations, including the A104, to assist walkers, cyclists and horse-riders crossing the roads; to reunite sections of the Forest dissected by roads; and to slow traffic speeds at this point.
3. Crossing Point schemes inevitably require the dedication of roadside verge to support widening, new infrastructure and footway treatments.
4. The growing volume of road traffic on Forest roads and the increasing complexity of road safety schemes both encourage Highway Authorities to seek additional Forest Land to better manage the road network across and adjoining Epping Forest.
5. While the Epping Forest Act provides powers for the dedication of highways, a key statutory purpose is to keep Epping Forest '*uninclosed and unbuilt on*', resisting and abating all '*all attempts to inclose, encroach, or build on any part thereof*'.
6. To address the progressive loss of Forest Land to Highway Improvement and Safety Schemes your Committee of November 2017 adopted a Land Retention Policy to secure compensatory land to replace land lost to Highway Improvement

Schemes. Such was the concern of Members at the gradual erosion of Forest boundaries that the policy was initially given a gearing ratio of 1:10 for lost Forest Land and to address the historic loss of Forest Land. This position was altered to consideration by Committee on a case-by-case basis in January 2019.

Current Position

7. ECC's Epping Forest Local Highways Panel (LHP) has sought the City Corporation's support for a safe crossing point on Honey Lane between The Woodbine Public House and the Woodbine Close Residential Park to the north of the A121 and Epping Forest, and the bus service to Loughton, to the south. The crossing would also benefit walkers, cyclists and horse riders entering the Forest from Woodgreen Road.
8. The crossing proposals included a substantial widening of the A121 estimated at 50.9m² of Forest Land to enable the construction of a pedestrian refuge on the busy road. Your Officers would prefer to see a 'Pegasus' Crossing – a signalised pedestrian crossing with special consideration for horse riders - at this point. This would preclude the need for road widening, however, under current Highway Authority guidance, the 40mph Speed Restriction and current accident record do not currently justify a Pegasus Crossing.
9. Officers for ECC have indicated that the funding for the crossing point project is dependent on the previous standard dedication of Forest Land without compensation of 50.9m² (0.12 acres). A recent public meeting between ECC Officers and residents of the Woodbine Close Residential Park indicated considerable frustration with the delay in the provision of this crossing point.
10. ECC has indicated that it is unable to offer suitable compensatory land from its existing land ownership portfolio. To help address this shortfall the City Corporation could, subject to Committee approval, consider the sale to ECC of a suitable quantity of Buffer Land which could then be dedicated to compensate for the loss of Forest Land through dedication as Forest Land.
11. The matter is also complicated by the Epping Forest District Council's Local Plan, where the accompanying Infrastructure Plan indicates the need to make improvements to a number of road junctions to improve the increased flow of traffic associated with new developments. The IP proposals include a 'crawler lane' on Woodredon Hill which is contiguous with Honey Lane. Realistically, it is not possible to consider any road widening scheme while there is a threat to the Forest through a much more extensive road widening scheme.

Options

12. Your Committee can consider three options:

- i. **Scheme refusal:** The active consideration of a safe crossing point at Honey Lane by the Highway Authority is welcomed for both residents and forest visitors and fulfils an important Forest Transport Strategy objective. Refusing any scheme at Honey Lane would be counter to the agreed Policy and could

damage the City Corporation's reputation as a good neighbour and project partner. **This option is not recommended.**

- ii. **Request for Essex County Council approval for a signalised 'Pegasus' crossing associated with a corresponding speed restriction from 40mph to 30 mph.** The statutory obligation for vehicles to stop; the 'on-demand' element of the crossing and the shorter road traverse all represent positive benefits for Forest users seeking to access and egress the Forest on Honey Lane, in addition to Woodbine Park and Woodbine Inn customers seeking to access the Forest Car park and Loughton bus stop. Such a scheme is considered preferential to a crossing island without conceding road widening ahead of a proposed crawler lane along a larger section of Honey Lane/Woodridden Hill. A reduced speed restriction would require ECC to make a direction or order following public notice and consultation, the outcome of which cannot be pre-determined **This option is recommended.**
- iii. **Highway Dedication of 50.0m2 of Forest Land to facilitate road widening splays to accommodate a crossing island.** Officers always seek to avoid the dedication of Forest Land where there are viable alternatives. Although signalised crossing installations are expensive, the costs of compensating Forest Land and the so far uncoded realignment of buried services should increase the costs of the crossing island proposal which is currently seen to be more cost-effective. There are concerns that a traditional crossing point island at 1.5-2 metres wide would not offer sufficient shelter for equestrians, where the average length of a horse is 2.4 metres. Officers would continue to promote the Trustee's view that Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest Land is important and needs to be replaced at a higher ratio than 1:1 to reflect both its scarcity and historic loss to Essex County Council Road Schemes. **This option is not recommended.**

Proposals

- 13. It is proposed to seek Essex County Council Cabinet Member approval for a signalised 'Pegasus' crossing associated with a corresponding speed restriction from 40mph to 30 mph, which is felt to offer the best solution for users at Honey Lane, while avoiding unnecessary land dedication and substantial roadworks to realign buried and underground services.

Corporate Strategy Implications

- 14. **City of London Corporate Plan 2018 - 2023:** the protection of Epping Forest directly underscores the *third pillar* of the Corporate Plan, which is to "**shape outstanding environments**". The policy approach outlined in this report supports Outcome 12 "Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained".
- 15. **Open Spaces Department Business Plan 2016-19:** The Strategic Vision of this Business plan is to 'Preserve and protect our world class green spaces for the benefit of our local communities and the environment.'
- 16. **Forest Transport Strategy:** The primary aim of the Epping Forest Transport Strategy is to investigate and identify options in order to improve safety and

accessibility for Epping Forest users. The proposal meets one of the key aims of the Forest Transport Strategy by providing improved accessibility to the Forest for all users especially those arriving by public transport on foot and for cyclists.

Implications

17. **Legal** – Section 7(1.) of the Epping Forest Act 1878 states that *‘the Conservators shall at all times keep Epping Forest unenclosed and unbuilt on, ...and they shall by all lawful means prevent, resist, and abate all future inclosures, encroachments and buildings, and all attempts to inclose, encroach, or build on any part thereof’*.
18. Section 38 of the Act which outlines the General powers of the Conservators includes at section (1)(iv.) a power *‘To maintain and make roads, footpaths, and ways and to dedicate roads to the public, subject to the law of highways, and to afford facilities and grant rights of way for access to inclosures’*. There is therefore power to dedicate Forest Land for public highway purposes.
19. The power to acquire additional Forest Land under section 33.(1.)(xxvi.) of the Epping Forest Act 1878 is specifically limited to lands adjoining the Forest or reputed to have been formerly part of the waste lands thereof.
20. **Financial** – The cost of the Highway Improvement Schemes will be fully met by the relevant Highway Authority and will not place requirements on City Corporation capital or Local Risk budgets.
21. A 1:1 replacement ratio within the Land Retention Policy is unlikely to impose increased management costs, in that compensatory land would be managed at a similar level of cost. It is acknowledged that the transferring authority will enjoy an overall saving where public open space is transferred to the City Corporation.

Conclusion

The City Corporation and ECC are both committed through the Forest Transport Strategy to the provision of safe crossing points across road in and adjoining Forest Land. The City Corporation needs to balance the public benefit of the proposed safe crossing point with the loss of Forest Land which would be needed to facilitate a road widening scheme. A higher cost signalled Pegasus crossing is proposed as the preferred solution at this location which will prevent the loss of Forest Land, the need to expand the island capacity to support equestrians and the relocation of buried underground services

Background Papers

Epping Forest & Commons Committee Forest Transport Strategy
Epping Forest & Commons Committee Land Banking Report November 2017
Epping Forest & Commons Committee Land Retention Policy Report January 2019

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