

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest Consultative – <i>For discussion</i> Epping Forest and Commons – <i>For decision</i>	12 06 2019 08 07 2019
Subject: Highams Park. Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood Individual Site Plan (SEF 21/19)	Public
Report of: Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
Report author: Geoff Sinclair, Head of Operations, Epping Forest	

Summary

A Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest for the period of 2019-29 is being developed alongside a 2019-22 Business Plan. Given the relative size of the Forest and the marked variety of the landscapes and habitats there is a need to describe the discrete management of key areas.

This report outlines the Individual Site Plan that has been prepared for Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood. The property management issues and significant management considerations described in the ISP have been outlined along with management strategy proposed for the area.

Recommendation(s)

Consultative Members are asked to:

- i. Offer any comment on the draft Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood ISP
- ii. Subject to such comments approve the undermentioned draft documents for public consultation
 - a. Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood Individual Site Plan (ISP)
 - b. Highams Park Operations Plan
 - c. Highams Park Figures 1-4 of the Individual Site Plan

Main Report

Background

1. On the 11 March 2019, it was reported to your committee that a Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest for the period of 2019-29 is being developed. As part of the development process, existing operational activity in key geographical locations and for key activities is being reviewed.
2. The review process comprises an audit of the City Corporation's (CoL) property management issues alongside other significant management considerations to provide an overview of current practice and an outline of longer term aspirations.
3. This reports outlines the Individual Site Plan (ISP) for Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood that has been prepared as part of the review. Preparation of the ISP has involved input from local Stakeholders and in particular the Highams Park Snedders.

Current Position

4. Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood are part of Compartment 33 within Epping Forest, situated in the London Borough of Waltham Forest and have a total area of 53ha. The area forms part of the Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and is an Archaeological Priority Area (APA). Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood once formed part of an extensive designed landscape laid out by the significant Georgian landscape architect Humphrey Repton and the area is included in Schedule 18 of the London Borough of Waltham Forest's local plan as a Park and Garden of Local Historic Interest.
5. Within the area is a large water body known as Highams Park lake. This was originally designed to be an 'ornamental fish pond' and was created by damming the River Ching. The River Ching was then diverted to the west from its original position, where it can be found today. Highams Park Lake is regulated by the Reservoirs Act 1975 (as amended by the Flood and Water Management Act 2010) and is routinely inspected by an independent reservoir engineer twice a year. An £1.4 million safety improvement project which remodelled the dam was completed in 2013 by the City of London. Under a tenancy agreement with the City Corporation, the Walthamstow Scouts operate the Michael Mallinson Watersports Centre on the southern shore of the lake, from which they access the lake in canoes.
6. The adjacent parkland of The Highams Park (London Borough of Waltham Forest) is a popular visitor amenity. There is an active group of conservation volunteers, The Highams Park Snedders, who are part of the Highams Park Planning Group (HPPG). The HPPG have developed a Neighbourhood Plan for the area and have also recently opened a community coffee shop and associated public conveniences, which is operated as a Community Interest Company (CIC). Public footfall to The Highams Park and the adjacent Highams Park is expected

to increase over the coming years. The 2014 visitor survey for Highams Park recorded a total of 72,528 visits.

Proposals

7. The ISP first outlines the property management issues and other significant management considerations impacting on the area, before presenting a management strategy and outline management program. A more detailed operational work activity plan is presented in an appendix.

Property Management Issues

8. Property management issues, additional to the normal actions such as tree safety management which are undertaken through the Forest, and for which action will be required at Highams Park have been identified as:
 - a. Dam Infrastructure: Highams Park Lake has obligations under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010;
 - b. Infrastructure: Lake edge revetment maintenance;
 - c. Statutory designations: The compartment is one of eight (out of 38) SSSI Units in Epping Forest that has been assessed as 'Unfavourable-declining' or 'Unfavourable-no change' by Natural England;
 - d. Invasive species: Japanese Knotweed, Terrapins and Oak Processionary Moth have all been identified within the Highams Park area;
 - e. Boundaries: The registered boundary along Forest Glade is at variance with the views of some neighbours and is currently an active management area.
 - f. Utilities: There are unidentified sewage odours at the spillway to the lake. These have been a concern for some time and are still the subject of investigations with Thames Water and the Environment Agency.

Management Considerations

9. There are a wide range of management considerations given in the report and these have been summarised below:
 - a. Ecological: Much of the area is lapsed wood pasture which, having been integrated into a designed parkland landscape, is now incorporated as secondary woodland with a scattering of impressive mature and veteran Oak standards and pollards. A dominating landscape feature is the 2.7ha acre lake and the adjoining River Ching. During low flow events, the lake has been subject to incidents of hypoxia (oxygen depletion). Key woodland species include the fern-like herb Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatella*). Oak Hill Pond has been assessed as of high importance for amphibians.
 - b. Access: The growth of secondary woodland has affected the accessibility of the area which is relatively poor. In particular orientation and navigation can be especially difficult for new users. The main North-South path through Epping Forest, part of the Epping Forest Centenary walk, runs through Highams Park and can be difficult to use in winter months. There is no dedicated car park for what is an increasingly popular area and this

may be a developing issue with any expansion of Residential Parking Zones (RPZ).

- c. Community: There is very strong community engagement and involvement at Highams Park. There is a Neighbourhood Planning Group, the Highams Park Planning Group (HPPG) , which has established a volunteer group, the Highams Park Snedders, who undertake a range of practical tasks in the area. The HPPG has also established Community Interest Company (CIC) that has established a café in the adjacent formal park area. Walthamstow Scouts have for many years used the lake for canoeing and adjacent land for camping;
- d. Heritage: Highams Park was designed by Humphrery Repton, the foremost landscaper of his day. The remaining designed landscape is significant because so much of what was planned in Repton's 'Red Book' for Highams Park was carried out on the ground. Where this has not been built upon, the designed landscape is still in evidence, if fragmented. Highams Park is listed by the London Borough of Waltham Forest as a park and garden of local historic interest in the Local Plan to reflect this historic significance.

Management Strategy

- 10. In addition to the need to discharge its obligations with respect to property management issues, the ISP identifies a 10-year management strategy for Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood, summarised as follows:
 - a. to improve accessibility of and establish a clear identity for the area of Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood for local residents and Epping Forest users more generally, through enhanced gateways, signage (including nature interpretation boards at the Lake) and paths;
 - b. to highlight the heritage of Highams Park, Great Sale Wood, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood as a designed park and garden, by opening up historic views and managing the landscape in a manner that is sensitive to its historic past;
 - c. to identify a programme of conservation measures that will contribute towards improving the conservation status of the SSSI in Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood; and,
 - d. to strengthen and clarify local working arrangements and increase community involvement with the management of Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood.

Outline Management Program and Operations Plan spreadsheet

- 11. The ISP presents a 5-year outline management program which is then further detailed in Appendix 1 of the report (see the Operations Plan spreadsheet). This will be reviewed and updated yearly to monitor the progress of the management program and ensure that it continues to deliver the outcomes set out in the 10-year management strategy. As well as works to be undertaken using existing resources, potential enhancement projects requiring additional support are also identified. Three enhancement projects are outlined, for which it is proposed practical and/or financial support from community partners will be sought:

- a. Constructing a shared use surfaced permissive N-S path. Depending on the length of the path worked, its cost will range from £67,000 for a 1000m section through the Highams Park to £242,875 to establish a 3625m section from Whitehall road through Oak Hill Wood. Any path project would be subject to a further committee report.
- b. Restoring the wood pasture parkland aspect of Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood will require additional external funding.
- c. Physical improvement works to the ponds within Oak Hill Wood, such as de-silting and/or re-profiling the ponds, will also need additional external funding.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- 12. City of London Corporate Plan 2018 - 2023: the restoration and maintenance of the internationally and nationally-important habitats of Epping Forest directly underscore the *third pillar* of the Corporate Plan, which is to “*shape outstanding environments*”. The development of ISP’s and PDN form part of the operational planning to achieve this aim of the Corporate Plan.
- 13. Open Spaces Department Business Plan 2016-19: The Strategic Vision of this plan is to ‘Preserve and protect our world class green spaces for the benefit of our local communities and the environment.’ and one of the Department Objectives is to ‘Protect and conserve the ecology, biodiversity and heritage of our sites.’ The preparation of the Epping Forest Management Strategy and Management Plan for 2019-29 is a key action in the Departmental Business Plan.
- 14. No negative equality impacts were identified for this proposal with the prospect of improved accessibility for people with some disabilities and parents with young children.

Financial Implications

- 15. The outline management program has been framed to fit within existing levels of local risk spend at Highams Park, Little Sale and Oak Hill Wood.
- 16. Three projects have been identified which will only be progressed if additional financial and practical support can be obtained. Some activity may qualify for Countryside Stewardship funding and this is being investigated and will be subject to a separate report if available.

Conclusion

- 17. An ISP has been prepared for Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Wood. This identifies the property management issues and other significant management considerations that should be taken into account when approaching the management of this area, and which have drawn on the consultation and support of local stakeholders to develop.
- 18. A management strategy for the next 10 years is presented along with an outline management program and detailed work proposals (Operations Plan

spreadsheet). These proposals highlight works that can be achieved through existing Local Risk resources, but also where additional support will be required.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Highams Park, Little Sale Wood and Oak Hill Woods: Individual Site Plan
- Appendix 2 – Highams Park Operations Plan
- Appendix 3 – Highams Park Figures 1-4 of the Individual Site Plan

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