

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	10 03 2020
Subject: Implementation of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order on Fairmead Road, High Beach in partnership with Essex Highways (SEF 07/20)	Public
Report of: Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
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Summary

Your Committee of July 2018 supported a further restriction of the Fairmead Road Traffic Regulation Order implemented in 2012 by the use of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order to resolve the traffic management and amenity challenges of the Fairmead area of the Forest at a cost of £4,380. Approval was provided subject to the agreement of a mechanism to facilitate continued access to the road for visitors with impaired mobility. This further report is necessary to inform Committee that the use of the area by visitors with impaired mobility may have been overstated and that it has not been possible to identify a cost-effective system that would facilitate preferential access for some users groups to Fairmead Road.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- approve the introduction of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) at Fairmead Road between the Hill Wood Car Park and the existing vehicle barrier, in line with the aims of the Epping Forest Transport Strategy and in partnership with Essex Highways, for an 18-month period.
- commission the preparation of a report on the ETRO at the end of the trial period to assess the impacts of the measure on the Forest, the future status of the public highway and responsibility for long-term maintenance.

Main Report

Background

1. The medieval Fairmead Road forms part of a route from London and Cambridge. The diagonal junction with the Epping New Road at The Warren was closed in 1960s on road safety grounds. The resulting 'No Through Road' has become a particular focus for fly tipping and Anti-Social Behaviour. In addition, the road is recognised by Essex Police as a Public Sex Environment.
2. The Forest Transport Strategy (FTS) 2009-15 adopted by your Committee in 2009 promoted a range of highways improvements including speed

restrictions on Forest roads, improved signage and selected road closures. Fairmead Road was promoted in the FTS for closure to improve Forest tranquillity and your Committee of 10th November 2018 approved a compromise Road Traffic Order across half the road beyond Fairmead Oak car park, which was implemented by Essex Highway in July 2012.

3. The Epping Forest Consultative Committee on the 13th June 2018 and your Committee on the 9th July 2018, recommended that the City of London Corporation should approach Essex Highways with the intention of implementing an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) to permanently close the remaining 500m of Fairmead Road, High Beach to motorised vehicles. The intention of this proposal was to increase amenity in the Forest by providing quiet and traffic free passage through the Forest for visitors, to increase protection of the Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and to reduce the unacceptable Anti-Social Behaviour that occurred in the area.
4. While supporting the use of an ETRO your Committee sought to retain the use of Fairmead Road by members of the public with disabilities or impaired mobility. A meeting was agreed between selected members of the Committee, Epping Forest Officers and disability stakeholders highlighted by the Committee Members. This meeting has not been held as key contacts could not be established.
5. Instead Officers engaged with Epping Forest District Council's 'LifeWalks' healthy walking scheme targeting visitors over 50s. Contact with the organiser found that Fairmead was a chosen location because of the reliable availability of parking spaces and not because of the ease of access to the Forest. A preference was stated for the Forest's easy access trails at High Beach, Knighton Wood and Connaught Water, together with the open and level landscape of Chingford Plain and Bury Wood, . Instead of continued access to Fairmead Road, EFDC has a requested use of the extension car park at Chingford Plain.

Current

6. The four remaining elements of Fairmead Road which remain accessible to vehicles will require considerable investment to bring the route up to the recognised Fieldfare Trust standard .
 - a. Despite resurfacing in October 2018, the first 300m of Fairmead Road has a poor highway surface with multiple potholes and is prone to flooding. The high verge make it difficult to park along this section of highway without obstructing the thoroughfare to other vehicles.
 - b. At 300m there are two 'layby' type car parks known as Hillwood car parks 'East' and 'West'. Again, the surface of these car parks are not designated, designed or suitable for use by those with impaired mobility and are not recognised officially as car parks that the City of London would encourage visitors to utilise.

- c. The remaining 200m of open highway has an average incline of 10%, which would be considered too steep for wheelchair use. Again, the narrow width of the road at this location does not permit vehicle parking without damage to the Forest occurring.
 - d. Fairmead Oak Car Park has a single entrance gate from Fairmead Road. The car park surface unbonded and is uneven and inconsistent in its material grading. It is also utilised as a cattle storage area during the grazing season, so can be shut without notice in emergency and when operationally required.
7. Access to Connaught Water from Fairmead Oak car park is on a level gradient. However, it is 1,500m between sites and a total of 2.49 miles, if completed as a round trip including a loop of Connaught Water. Apart from the engineered 1km loop around Connaught Water. The 1,500m consists of approximately 750m of tarmac and 750m of rough surface ride that is not designed for wheelchair use. The entirety of this length is also prone to flooding.
 8. Officers have not been able to identify a viable and cost-effective option for preferential 'on demand' gate opening; a RADAR key unlocking option or electronic fob-operated gates to facilitate access for particular groups.
 9. Since the previous report in July 2018 there have been 10 large fly-tips along Fairmead Rd (three of which were cannabis production waste) this equates to around £1,000 in disposal costs, without associated staff and vehicle costs. The gate accessing the car park has been vandalised five times and two cars, including one used in an attempted murder in Woodford in July 2019, have been deposited on Forest adjacent to the highway and burnt out. Litter Pickers still spend on average 5 hours a week clearing rubbish from the open section of highway at the location.

Options

10. Your Committee can consider 3 options:
11. **Option 1** – That the City of London Corporation works in partnership with Essex Highways to trial an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) to restrict motorised vehicle access along the first 500m of Fairmead Road, High Beach between the Hill Wood car park and the existing vehicle barrier. This would bring the remainder of this route in line with the current Road Traffic Order in place on the 700m of highway between Fairmead Oak Car Park and the Epping New Road and would also meet the objectives of the approved Forest Transport Strategy, that was adopted by Essex County Council Highways.
This option is Recommended.
12. **Option 2** – Maintain the continuation of motorised vehicle access along the first 500m of highway, accompanied by action to close off Epping

Forest car parks: Fairmead Road East/West and Fairmead Oak, in an attempt to restrict anti-social behaviour to the public highway. It is believed that this approach will not deter fly tipping and will simply displace Anti-Social Behaviour. **This option is not Recommended.**

13. **Option 3** –Maintain the continuation of motorised vehicle access along the first 500m of highway and keep all car parks within the area open. This approach would enable fly tipping and difficult to control anti-social behaviour to continue. **This option is not Recommended.**

Proposals

14. The use of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) for the first 500m of Fairmead Road is proposed for traffic management and amenity purposes. Forest Visitors will still be able to access 'Hill Wood Car Park' and the 'Original Tea Hut' tenancy within the trading hours of the 'Original Tea Hut' 0900hrs -1700hrs approx. This will require the installation of a gate beyond the exit of the Hill Wood Car Park, 50m from the junction.
15. Following the 18-month trial period of the ETRO, it is proposed that a report is brought to your Committee with a review and assessment of the impacts of the closure. Should the trial meet expectations it would be further proposed to put forward a scheme for the 'stopping up' or permanent exclusion of vehicular traffic from this route. This would be the outcome envisaged in the approved Forest Transport Strategy and would provide a significant new length of multi-user pathway to enhance the enjoyment of visitors to this part of the Forest, including walkers, horse-riders and cyclists.
16. The costs associated with future adoption and maintenance of this route for Forest visitors would need to be negotiated with Essex County Council Highways and with Epping Forest District Council as a key part of the Mitigation Strategy for the protection of the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation from the impacts of the residential development in the forthcoming Local Plan.
17. The Local Essex County Council Highways Panel have approved scheme, and their main contractor Ringway Jacobs is able to install at a cost of £4,380 to install highways complaint gates. Unlike the previous TRO, the ETRO is installed without public consultation and therefore there are no advertising costs associated with the scheme.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

18. The proposal meets two of the Corporate Plan 2019-2022 by Contributing to a Flourishing society by making people safe and feeling safe and Shaping Outstanding Environments by ensuring our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained. The proposal also meets the Open Spaces

Department Outcome 1 that 'Our Open Spaces, heritage and cultural assets are protected, conserved and enhanced'.

19. **Forest Transport Strategy 2009:** This 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

20. **Financial:** The £4,380 cost of the ETRO infrastructure will be met from the Epping Forest Local Risk budget.
21. **Legal:** An ETRO is made by the Highway Authority, under Sections 9 and 10 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. This arrangement ETRO is very similar to a permanent traffic regulation order in that it imposes traffic and parking restrictions such as road closures, controlled parking and other parking regulations. The Experimental Traffic Order can also be used to change the way existing restrictions function. An Experimental Traffic Order is an experimental order which only stay in force for a maximum of 18 months while the effects are monitored and assessed. Changes can be made during the first six months of the experimental period to any of the restrictions (except charges) if necessary, before the Council decides whether or not to continue with the changes brought in by the experimental order on a permanent basis.
22. **Equality:** Equality impacts have been fully considered in relation to restricting vehicle access to this site. As has been demonstrated from the report the Fairmead Road and Fairmead Oak locality do not currently offer specific facilities for disabled users and hence restricted access will not detrimentally affect any of the protected characteristics.
23. **Charity:** Epping Forest is a registered charity (number 232990). Charity Law obliges Members to ensure that the decisions they take in relation to the Charity must be taken in the best interests of the Charity.

Conclusion

24. The 18-month experimental closure of vehicular access to Fairmead Road is expected to have a positive effect on the Forest due to the improve in amenity and traffic management objectives. The current car park arrangement is not engineered for use for those with impaired mobility and alternative suitable options have been installed and are available within the local area.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Map Fairmead Road, High Beach – Proposed ETRO

Background papers

Report to Epping Forest & Commons Committee 10th November 2008: *Forest Transport Strategy* (SEF 36/08)

The Epping Forest Transport Strategy – proposals 2009-2016. City of London and Essex County Council

Epping Forest and Commons Committee - Proposal for Experimental Traffic Regulation Order on Fairmead Road, High Beach in partnership with Essex Highways (SEF 32/18)

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