

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Date(s):</b> 8 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Epping Forest and Commons	
<b>Subject:</b> Swaines Green, Epping – Management Plan	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 21/13	<b>For Decision</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Swaines Green was purchased by the City of London with significant financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2005. The management of the land has largely been carried out by volunteers, particularly those supervised by Epping Forest Countrycare and The Friends of Swaines Green group. The Friends group has also developed various access and habitat management proposals, two of which – a boardwalk and new pond – have been implemented.</p> <p>Future access and conservation work requires coordination and agreement on the priorities in order to enhance the value of the site for wildlife and access and to prevent avoidable habitat losses. This report presents a detailed Management Plan which addresses the priorities for the site and provides the framework for a work programme over the next 5 years. The emphasis of the Plan is to consolidate and improve the previous habitat work, such as the pond excavation, whilst ensuring restoration of the grassland area, the establishment of a coppicing cycle and the improved access within the secondary woodland with more open and varied rides and pathways. The draft of this Plan has met with approval from the key partners at the Friends of Swaines Green and Epping Forest District and Epping Town Councils.</p> <p><b>Recommendation(s)</b></p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve the draft Management Plan to allow its implementation in partnership with the Friends of Swaines Green, Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV), Epping Forest District Council Countrycare service and other stakeholders.</li> </ul>	

## Main Report

### **Background**

1. Swaines Green (5.64 hectares) was purchased by the City of London with significant financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2005. The

purchase was coordinated with Epping Forest District and Epping Town Councils which, at the same time, bought an adjacent area to the north known as Lovelocks Field. The aim was to protect the open, accessible countryside adjacent to Forest Land in line with Buffer Land Policy, especially the ancient green lanes and remnant green lane boundaries in this area and maintain a place for people's enjoyment.

2. Despite early discussions and liaison with Epping Forest Countrycare, Epping Forest District Council's countryside management service, a coordinated list of priority tasks was not established in the first few years. However, wildlife survey work was carried out by the Friends and an invertebrate specialist, familiar with Epping Forest, produced a detailed report indicating the value of the scrub edges and wet grassland habitats. The surveys provided good evidence of the key species on site (see Appendix 1).
3. Since 2005 Swaines Green has been managed largely by volunteer groups organised and supervised by Epping Forest Countrycare. The Friends of Swaines Green worked with Epping Forest Countrycare to install a boardwalk on the western edge of the site. The Friends also arranged for a pond to be excavated, which has since had to be modified significantly due to problems with its design and also with the execution of the work.
4. Grassland at the northern end of the site (Lower Lincolns) – the only section easily accessible to tractors and mowing machines – has been mown several times since 2005 by the in-house Grassland Team or by contractors, as time and resources have allowed.

### **Current Position**

5. Following problems with the pond works (see above) and the lack of an agreed plan for volunteers to work with, there has been a suspension of volunteer tasks over the last 2 years.
6. Work restarted on a management plan in 2011 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> draft of the Management Plan is attached at **Appendix 1**. This plan is aimed at providing the basis for future conservation work by volunteers, staff and/or contractors.
7. A second draft of this plan, very similar to the draft attached, has been circulated to the Friends of Swaines Green and Epping Forest Countrycare and has received agreement. The only changes since then have been to add in a brief section about management of the hedgerows and some minor wording and text changes. These are included in the 3<sup>rd</sup> draft attached as Appendix 1.
8. The current Epping Forest Local Plan consultation includes proposals to zone land to the west of Swaines Green for residential development which will accentuate the importance of Swaines Green as a Public Open Space.

### **Rationale for Management Plan programme**

9. The options for management of Swaines Green depend largely on the input of volunteer time because of the current limited access for machinery and other competing priorities for the in-house teams over the next 5 years.

10. More importantly, the nature of the site, having been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund with the aim of providing a resource for the local community, requires local community involvement in the management and care of the site.
11. The balance of volunteer time and in-house staff resources (or contractors) should be considered in this context.

## **Proposals**

12. The attached Management Plan (Appendix 1) outlines the proposed management priorities for the next 5 years.
13. A key priority is to halt the loss of the unimproved damp grassland to encroaching trees and scrub because this habitat is rare now in Essex.
14. To assist with achieving this work Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) have confirmed that they will adopt this site as one of their “core sites” where they would aim to carry out tasks every year and include return visits to complete distinct projects.
15. The site is divided into 3 distinctive areas, Lower Lincolns, Middle Lincolns and Forties Field. The priorities for each of these areas are based on the current condition of the habitats in each of them. For example, Middle and Lower Lincolns have the best remaining grassland and so are priorities for early work. Forties Field has become secondary woodland and the priority here is to improve access and widen rides to allow a more varied habitat to develop.
16. The main proposed habitat management for the next 5 years involves grassland restoration by Bramble and Blackthorn removal, ride widening, developing the wildlife value of the pond by planting some aquatic plants if necessary and beginning a coppicing cycle should volunteer availability allow. These proposals are summarised in the Map on page 12 of the attach Plan at Appendix 1.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

### ***City Together***

17. The work and proposals outlined above, meet the City Together vision of a World Class City, and specifically, 2 of its 5 themes: “A World Class City that supports our communities” and “A World Class City which protects, promotes and enhances our environment”. The Forest environment is significantly enhanced by the protection and sympathetic management of the Buffer Lands.

### ***Open Spaces Department Business Plan***

18. This report supports the Open Spaces Department’s strategic aims of;
  - Providing high quality accessible Open Spaces and services in accordance with nationally recognised standards for the benefit of London and the Nation,
  - Involving communities in the management of our sites,

- Adopting sustainable working practices, promoting the variety of life (biodiversity) and protecting the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations.

### ***Epping Forest Management Plan***

19. This report also exemplifies the Epping Forest Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in particular;
  - Epping Forest's position as a unique and ancient landscape for people and wildlife will be strengthened,
  - Epping Forest will be highly valued as part of a larger and fully accessible protected landscape area.

### **Implications**

20. **Financial** - The work proposed in the Swaines Green Management Plan (Appendix 1) would be funded out of the Epping Forest local risk budget as required and as available depending on other priorities.
21. EFCV have adopted the site as a "core site" (see para 13 above) and so this will allow the programme of work to start and it will largely be carried out by volunteers in the foreseeable future.
22. **Legal** - There are no specific legal implications in the proposals above (for insurance see HR below).
23. **Property** - The management plan addresses landscape maintenance proposals, and excepting some attendant minor fencing repair, does not entail additional costs or repair and maintenance expenditure in respect of built assets.
24. However, the Superintendent should agree the works specification and any associated funding issues and on-going maintenance implications with the volunteers prior to implementation, to be assured that the works do not unduly impact upon local risk expenditure nor increase the City's future maintenance liability.
25. **Human Resources** - Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) have adopted the site as a "core site" for their annual work programme. It is likely that any volunteers from the Friends of Swaines Green (FoSW) could take part in EFCV events. However, should the FoSW wish to organise and carry out volunteering events themselves the Epping Forest Volunteer Development Officer will liaise with them in accordance with the Service Agreement for Volunteer Groups in order to cover issues such as insurance.

### **Conclusions**

26. Since 2005 Swaines Green has become an important area of Buffer Land protecting and adding to the Forest's ancient green lane network to the west of Epping. It also provides a significant and much-valued local community resource for walking, playing and the occasional events like the local May Fair. Following several years of piecemeal management the Plan presented with this report seeks to provide a robust framework for planning and

coordinating future conservation and access operations, especially those involving local volunteers.

## **Appendices**

- **Appendix 1** – *3<sup>rd</sup> Draft* Swaines Green Management Plan

## **Background Papers:**

None

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