

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee	22 April 2015
<b>Subject:</b> Cycling in Highgate Wood	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	<b>For Decision</b>

### Summary

This report provides information for the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee to make a recommendation to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee on whether the cycling ban in Highgate Wood should be upheld. A member of the public, and a cyclist, has requested that the prohibition of cycling in Highgate Wood be lifted based on the safer cycling environment that Highgate Wood offers and the national and local policies on encouraging and supporting cycling and its health benefits. This report will provide evidence for both lifting and upholding the cycling ban in the light of recent information, and the increasing popularity and political support for sustainable transport.

### Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the report, and make recommendations to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee that the Officers will raise the issue of improving cycling safety and provision along the Muswell Hill Road with the London Borough of Haringey.
- Officers also recommend that Byelaw 10 be maintained and enforced but that children under the age of 12 be allowed to ride a bicycle under close supervision.

### Main Report

#### The growing popularity and benefits of cycling

1. There has been a massive increase in cycling in London over the last 15 years; a report issued by Transport for London in 2011 reported a 150% rise in cycling in the 10 year period between 2000 and 2010, and there has been a corresponding campaign at both governmental and local authority level to encourage Londoners to get out of their cars and cycle instead. The advantages of cycling are many; personal well-being, economical, zero emissions, and low impact on both the natural environment and the built infrastructure. The only real disadvantage is that cyclists have to share the road network with cars and commercial traffic and that is inherently dangerous.

2. The road safety issue for cycling has become a major political issue, following a spate of fatalities in 2013 in central London and a call for improved provision for cycling on the road network. There is now a widely publicised campaign and public consultation leading up the proposed Cycle Superhighway Project that will provide a new cycle route through central London connecting east to west; the cyclists answer to the Cross Rail Project. The current Mayor and the Greater London Authority are backing this ambitious Project and launched the 'Vision for Cycling' in March 2013. Various Local Authorities have their own Cycling promotion policies and offer local authority employees' preferential loan schemes to purchase bicycles for travelling to work.

### **City of London's support of cycling**

3. The City is also playing a central part in the Cycle Superhighway Project already mentioned above; with significant sections of the cycle route passing through the City and the additional north south route also transecting the Square Mile. New contra flows cycle lanes are being built in congested areas and the City is working with Transport for London on delivering part of the 'Quiet Ways' Project, another scheme to divert cyclists off busy traffic routes onto safer routes. The City of London also promotes cycling with various schemes including charitable ride events; the Lord Mayor took part in a 100 kilometre charity ride to Oxford in June 2013. The City of London Corporation offers a bicycle loan scheme at very favourable rates to all its employees.
4. At many of the City of London's Open Spaces cycling is actively encouraged including Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest; the Heath has a total of just over four kilometres of designated cycle paths which are shared with pedestrians. Epping Forest offers an extensive network of cycle routes and also a bicycle hire scheme. City of London Open Spaces staff are increasingly using bicycles in the course of their patrolling and Rangering duties, including electric bikes to take some of the pain out of the hilly sections.

### **The Cycling ban in Highgate Wood.**

5. Cycling has been prohibited in Highgate Wood for many years, and the ban is enacted in Bye Law Number 10, which also prohibits motor cycles, tricycles, wheel barrows, and motorised vehicles. The Bye Laws were last revised in 1997.
6. There are a number of reasons for the cycle ban in the Wood. First and foremost it is the informed belief of the staff and management that allowing cyclists into the Wood will compromise the safety of pedestrians and especially young children, and the elderly, both of whom make up a large proportion of the visitor profile for the site. Prior to the installation of the bicycle barriers in 2006/7 there were regular conflict situations between pedestrians and cyclists. The earlier barriers were largely ineffective and many cyclists were able to use the commuter route between Onslow and Gypsy Gates as an alternative to using Muswell Hill Road.
7. Since the installation of the barriers the number of cyclists gaining access has fallen considerably and the commuter route from both Onslow Gate and Cranley Gate to the north down to Gypsy Gate is now much safer for pedestrians especially at busy commuter periods and weekends.

8. Highgate Wood does make a concession for children under the age of 12 to cycle in the Wood, recognising that the vehicle free pathways and the lack of obstructions make for a relatively safe environment to learn how to ride.
9. The additional concern is that with Highgate Wood visitor numbers approaching the 900,000 mark, and increasing annually, introducing cycling is simply going to increase the already significant issue of visitor pressure on the woodland environment. Incrementally the understory and herb layer of the woodland is being eroded and degraded simply by the sheer numbers of visitors and there is a real concern that the site has reached a critical state, where woodland regeneration will become increasingly difficult to achieve.

### **The case for allowing cycling in Highgate Wood**

10. The representation calling for the lifting of the cycling ban in Highgate Wood makes the point that there is open access to cyclists in a number of Open Spaces in the London Borough of Haringey including Finsbury Park, Parkland Walk and also Alexandra Park. It is possible to cycle from Finsbury Park along the Parkland Walk as far as Archway Road, and also from Alexandra Palace Park to Muswell Hill Road. Unfortunately, cyclists are then required to use the road network to the west and also to the south both of which are busy roads.
11. There have been proposals to effectively continue the route west from the northern section of Parkland walk from Muswell Hill Road, following the old Alexandra Palace railway line around the north and western edge of Highgate Wood. This proposal was not viable due to the large footprint of the Tube Network's servicing yard which effectively blocks the route just south of Lanchester Gardens.
12. The case is made that cyclists should be allowed the option of using the pathway in Highgate Wood that runs north/south parallel with Muswell Hill Road. The rough non tarmacked surface will discourage cyclists from travelling at speed and signage can be installed to encourage cyclists to respect pedestrians and to adopt a precautionary attitude especially during busy periods. The assumption is that the majority of commuter cyclists will choose to ride down or up Muswell Hill Road, due to the pathway surface in Highgate Wood and the presence of pedestrians. Those cyclists that choose to cycle through the Wood will be able to enjoy the woodland environment and the less steep inclines, and of course the lack of vehicles.

### **Other possible solutions worth exploring**

13. Muswell Hill Road although a very busy route for vehicle traffic does have the advantage of having a bus lane on the south bound side which does mean that cyclist are separated from vehicles (apart from buses and taxis). There are a number of maps with accident statistics for cyclists that have been made available on the internet, and there are no incidents recorded on Muswell Hill Road, but there have been accidents at the Archway Road intersection.
14. There is also the possibility of creating a purpose built contraflow route for cyclist along Muswell Hill Road. The pavement on the western side of the road that runs along the fence line of Highgate Wood could conceivably be converted into a cycle lane, but clearly this would be an expensive project that

Haringey could ill afford in the climate of continuing cuts. However, it should be considered as an alternative, as there are no side roads or vehicle access points.

15. The London Borough of Haringey refers to the promotion of cycling and improvement of cycling provision across the Borough in their Local Plan: Strategic Policies 2013-2026. They refer to the London Cycle Network and give an assurance that cycling will be considered in all highway improvement work. The Highgate Wood Manager will be making contact with the Highways Team at Haringey and will be investigating what plans the Local Authority have for improving cycling provision on Muswell Hill Road.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

16. The proposal contributes to producing a Clean, Pleasant and Attractive City (Objective CPAC4) and to Conserve and Protect Biodiversity (Goal 15) in the Community Strategy. It will help fulfil the Department's Strategic Goals and Objectives 2 (To adopt sustainable and sensitive working practices, promote biodiversity and protect the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations) and 5 (To ensure that the profile of the Open Spaces is further recognised through working in partnership with others to promote our sites and through influencing policies at a local, regional and national level).
17. Allowing cycling in Highgate Wood would also conflict with key objectives in the Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan. The management of visitor pressure and the vulnerability of the Ancient Woodland habitat are both key issues and are referenced in the policy section of the document (Section D).

### **Implications**

18. Should the decision be taken to lift the ban on cycling in Highgate Wood a number of changes would have to be made to the entrances to allow access for cyclists. The existing entrances with integral barriers would need to be modified, and signage would need to be changed. The other important factor would be the amendment to the existing Bye Laws requiring the approval of the Secretary of State. All the above would have costs implications.

### **Conclusion**

19. Highgate Wood is an Ancient Woodland site, and Ancient Woodland is a vulnerable habitat. Add to that the additional factor of the urban location of the site and the increasing numbers of users visiting the site, are a growing concern. Against these concerns the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee needs to consider the obvious benefits of cycling and the added attraction of being able to cycle in a woodland setting without the danger of road vehicles.

### **Appendices**

- None

## **Background Papers**

- Transport for London. 'Travel in London: Report 4'. Available to view or download from: <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/travel-in-london-report-4.pdf>

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