

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest & Commons	9 May 2016
Subject: Request to reprovide the Woodford Wells Drinking Fountain	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest (SEF 17/16)	For Decision
Report author: Paul Thomson, Superintendent of Epping Forest	

Summary

This report considers a request by a newly formed amenity group who are seeking to reprovide the once distinctive Woodford Wells Drinking Fountain at its original location on Epping Forest Land at Woodford Wells.

The amenity group fully appreciates that the City is unable to fund and care for such facility and intends to both privately raise the necessary capital to reprovide a reproduction of the original fountain and shelter and endow a fund to meet the ongoing maintenance costs.

At this early stage the amenity group are seeking your Committee's 'in principle' agreement that Forest land could be used to host a reproduction fountain and shelter. Decisions regarding the final design, cost and ongoing maintenance provision would be subject to a subsequent full licence agreement which would be placed before your Committee if the project gains sufficient momentum.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve in principle that Forest Land at Woodford Wells could be used to host a reproduction fountain and shelter, subject to further Committee approval of the final design and funding arrangements for both construction, operation, maintenance and if necessary decommissioning.

Background

1. Woodford Wells took its name from a series of mineral wells, most probably Chalybeate waters, containing salts of iron, which during the Georgian period saw Woodford enjoy a brief reputation as a country spa.
2. According to Benjamin Allen in his 1711 'The Natural History of the Mineral Waters of Great Britain' 'The 'Horse and Well' public house adjacent to Forest land at Woodford Wells was included as one of 30 watering places across England.

3. Christy and Thresh suggest in their 'Mineral Waters and Medicinal Springs of Essex' (1910) that Epping Forest Verderer Edward North Buxton (1840-1924) sponsored the erection of a drinking fountain and shelter close to the site of the original wells, most probably at some point after 1863.
4. The granite fountain and distinctive enamelled tile shelter appeared in many photographs of the area, until circa 1920 (see Appendix 1), after which time the fountain and shelter appears to have been lost.
5. Built in response to shortages of clean water, the prevalence of water borne diseases and the heavy reliance on brewed beverages, there is a strong tradition of Victorian wells and drinking fountains across the Epping Forest. These include the Samuel Gurney & Edward Wakefield (1859) and Joseph Fry Memorial (circa 1896) drinking fountains both on Wanstead Flats. There are also many fountains with distinctive shelters such as the Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee Fountain (1897), George Green; Hollybush Hill Fountain (1872), Snaresbrook; Woodford High Road Fountain, Woodford Green; and the Kings Head Hill Fountain, Chingford, together with similar fountains in Loughton and Epping Town Centres.
6. The neglected Durning-Lawrence Fountain (1899) at Dannat's Hill, Chingford was restored by the City of London with Heritage Lottery Funding in 2012 at a cost of £25,000, as part of the Epping Forest Branching Out project.
7. Most fountains are in the care of the immediate Local Authority, though a number of unrestored fountains and troughs remain the responsibility of the City of London. The Superintendent has therefore indicated that the City of London is unable to take on responsibility for any further facilities.

Current Position

8. Members of the local community of Woodford, including members of the Woodford Green Amenity Group and the Woodford Historical Society have proposed reproviding the former drinking fountain Woodford Wells on its original location on Forest Land.
9. The newly formed group fully appreciates that the City of London Corporation is unable to fund and care for such facility and intends to both privately raise the necessary capital to reprovise a reproduction of the original fountain and shelter and endow a fund to meet the ongoing maintenance costs.
10. The group intends to raise funds from specialist fountain funders including the The Drinking Fountain Association, formerly the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association (1858), the Water UK – Children's Health Fund and potentially the Heritage Lottery Fund, together with local businesses and the wider community.
11. The Group believes that the proximity of Bancrofts School, recent moves restrict the consumption of sugary drinks to help address childhood obesity; concern over plastic water bottle litter and the increased need for water by Forest users engaged in vigorous physical activity, particularly runners and cyclists, will help win funding for a new drinking fountain.

12. At this early stage, the new amenity group are seeking your Committee's 'in principle' agreement that Forest Land could be used to host a reproduction fountain and shelter. Decisions regarding the dedication of the fountain, final design, construction cost, operation, ongoing maintenance provision and if necessary decommissioning would be subject to a subsequent full licence agreement which would be placed before your Committee and the Gateway Project process for final approval if the project gains sufficient momentum.

Options

13. There are three options available to your Committee:
 - a. Refuse the project on the grounds that the restoration of the fountain would not be appropriate to maintaining the natural aspect of Epping Forest. This option is not recommended.
 - b. Undertake the project with City of London funding. A restored fountain is not central to the Conservators duties and has cost implications at a time when the City of London is seeking to reduce its maintenance liabilities. This option is not recommended.
 - c. Approve the project 'in principle' on the understanding that the new amenity Group will provide sufficient expertise and funding to restore and maintain the fountain and shelter without any call upon the City of London. This option is recommended.

Proposal

14. The recreation of the Woodford Wells Fountain would restore a local landmark that stood on the site for possibly 60 years and as well as hinting at the area's spring and spa history, reflecting a tradition of public Victorian drinking fountains across Epping Forest.
15. The newly formed amenity group would need to become a legally constituted body and satisfy the City of London that it has the skills, expertise and funding to deliver a project of this nature. In particular, in addition to initial construction costs, an endowment fund would be needed to meet the costs of operation, safety testing and maintenance, alongside a bond to cover decommissioning should it become necessary. The Chamberlain may be prepared to consider investing the endowment fund on behalf of the amenity group.
16. To avoid any risk of the City inheriting costly maintenance obligations, the group should be granted a licence with enforceable licence terms, including liability for any adverse public health impacts. Risk would also need to be mitigated by a clear recognition that any default in maintenance would lead to the City removing the facility and disposing of the fountain and shelter.

Corporate and Strategic Implications

17. **Open Spaces Department Business Plan** – Specifically, the proposals meets the Open Spaces Department's Business Plan by extending partnership-working and protecting the Open Spaces.
18. **Financial** – Initial estimates suggest that a reproduction granite fountain and oak and tile shelter will cost in the region of £75,000. The Amenity Group have given undertakings that the City of London will not be exposed to costs arising from the construction, operation or maintenance of the new fountain and associated shelter.
19. **Legal** – The City of London has powers under section 9(2) '*For the purpose of providing or improving opportunities for the enjoyment of open space by the public and in the interest of persons resorting to the open space, the Corporation may provide such facilities, services and works as may appear to them to be necessary or expedient, including meals and refreshments, parking places for vehicles, shelters and lavatory accommodation*'.
20. **Property** – If the drinking fountain and shelter are to be permitted on the Forest and subject to the City Corporation's powers of grant, suitable terms should be negotiated with the party involved to protect the City Corporation against unintended interests, to include an obligation for all future maintenance and costs associated with the structures to be met by the third party, and reserve the right for the City Corporation to seek future removal for whatever reason should it so require.

Conclusion

21. The restoration of the Durning-Lawrence Fountain at Dannat's Hill, Chingford has both retained an item of heritage interest and revived a valuable amenity by providing free water for Forest visitors. The ambitious project by local volunteers to recreate the Woodford Wells Drinking Fountain and Shelter would restore a lost landmark and offer similar public benefits without exposing the City of London to additional maintenance responsibilities.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Photographs of the Woodford Wells Drinking Fountain and Shelter.

Paul Thomson

Superintendent of Epping Forest

T: 0208 532 1010

Email: paul.thomson@cityoflondon.gov.uk

