

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	3 July 2017
Subject: Epping Town Green – Further report on the Impact of proposed Highway Improvements on Forest Land (SEF 13/17)	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest	For Decision
Report author: Sue Rigley – Epping Forest	

Summary

Epping Town Green is a 2.4 acre triangular area of Forest Land located on the edge of Epping Town Centre, which is managed on behalf of the City of London Corporation by Epping Town Council. Over the past 35 years, the City of London Corporation and Epping Town Council have sought the closure of the Lindsey Street spur road which crosses Epping Town Green to both better manage damage to the spur road verges by Heavy Goods Vehicles and protect the setting of the Grade II Listed War Memorial.

As reported to your Committee of 15 May in order to close the Lindsey Street spur road fronting the War Memorial, Essex County Council needs to undertake junction improvements at Lindsey Street (B181) / Palmers Hill (B1393) to facilitate, the eastward and westward journeys of large vehicles between the Nazeing/Epping Green area and Theydon Mount/Ongar.

The junction improvement works at Palmers Hill require approximately 45m² of Epping Forest Land to be dedicated for highway purposes. The closure of the spur road and the creation of a public footway fronting the war memorial will return to the Forest a corresponding 45m² of land therefore satisfying your Committee's policy position on seeking compensatory land for Forest Land dedicated to support Highway Schemes.

Your Committee of 15 May instructed the Superintendent to pursue only the closure of the Lindsey Street spur road. This report is necessary to advise your Committee that following further discussions with Essex County Council, Senior Highway Officers have reiterated that the Highway Authority can only safely achieve the spur road closure with the completion of junction improvements at Lindsey Street/Palmers Hill. Epping Town Council, who has been consulted on this matter, intends to provide a letter of support for the scheme as currently proposed.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- i. Approve the dedication to public highway of approximately 45m² of Forest Land at Epping Town Green, Epping in favour of Essex County Council for the widening of the junction of Lindsey Street (A) / Palmers Hill SUBJECT TO:
 - (a) 45m² of Lindsey Street (B) being stopped up and incorporated into Forest Land, and laid out to the reasonable satisfaction of the Superintendent
 - (b) The remaining 60m² of Lindsey Street being laid out as footpath to the reasonable satisfaction of the Superintendent, and all vehicular rights being prohibited
- ii. Note that the overall exchange of land is neutral with the new dedication of 45m² of Forest Land at Lindsey Street (A) being addressed by the surplus of 45m² at Lindsey Street (B) being incorporated into Forest Land.
- iii. Instruct the Superintendent to negotiate a care and maintenance agreement with Epping Town Council for Epping Town Green.
- iv. Instruct the Comptroller and City Solicitor to undertake any necessary documentation.

Main Report

Background

1. The Epping Town Green, also locally known as North Green, is held in trust by the City of London Corporation and forms part of Epping Forest under the Arbitrators Award of 1882. Although no formal agreement exists, Epping Town Council cares for and maintains the Green on behalf of the City Corporation and with the Town Council meeting all the routine maintenance costs.
2. Epping Town Green is bounded by Church Hill to the east and the B1393 Palmers Hill to the west. In addition, the Green is criss-crossed by further highways namely Church Field; Lindsey Street (B181), referred to as Lindsey Street (A) in this report, and also a spur also known as Lindsey Street and referred to as Lindsey Street (B) in this report (See Appendix 1). The routes all predate the Arbitration award and therefore no formal dedication agreements are held by the City Corporation.
3. Over the past 35 years the bisected and eroded character of the Epping Town Green was discussed on many occasions between the District Council, the Town Council and the City Corporation. Particular concern was expressed by all parties on the condition of Lindsey Street (B) and its impact on the setting of the War Memorial. The Conservators had taken the view that the right approach to the continuing erosion of the Green was to rationalise and close roads across the Green.

Current Position

4. Essex County Council has approached the Superintendent with a new scheme that has the support of Members of the Essex County Council, Epping Forest Local Highways Panel (LHP) and Epping Town Council.
5. The scheme proposes the widening of the junction at Lindsey Street (A) (B181)/Palmers Hill (B1393) to allow coaches, farm machinery and Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) travelling eastwards and westwards between Nazeing, Epping Green and Theydon Mount and Ongar to better manoeuvre through the junctions formed around Epping Green
6. In compensation the scheme proposes to end damage to the Green and the War Memorial frontage by removing the 105 m² narrow Lindsey Street (B) in front of the War Memorial Green replacing it with 60m² of surfaced public footpath and 45m² of additional grass verge to be made up to the existing level of the adjacent Green.
7. Essex County Council's proposals seek 45m² of land to be dedicated from the City Corporation at the Lindsey Street (A) / Palmers Hill junction in exchange for the City gaining 45m² for the Town Green Forest land at Lindsey Street (B). This neutral approach reflects the compensatory approach of the proposed land banking policy favoured by members in order to manage the further dedication of Forest land to public highway.
8. At your Committee of 15 May Members rejected the proposal for a compensatory exchange and instructed the Superintendent to seek only the closure of the Lindsey Street Spur Road (B) which had been closed for 4 weeks as a Highway Store during road improvements in the area in 2015.
9. Subsequent discussions with Essex County Council Senior Highway Officers, have demonstrated that the Highway Authority can only safely achieve the spur road closure with the completion of junction improvements at Lindsey Street/Palmers Hill. Closure of Lindsey Street (B) alone does not meet Highways England's 'Standards for Highways' (2017). Engineering drawings showing the relationship between the land proposed for dedication and the required new road utilisation based on wheel track and vehicle overhang associated with larger vehicles is shown at Appendix 2

Options

10. There are three options available to your Committee:
 - a. Continue with current arrangements. The current restricted road layout is contributing to damage to the Green from larger Heavy Good Vehicles and does not address community concerns regarding the context and setting of the War Memorial. **This option is NOT RECOMMENDED**

- b. Continue to pursue the closure of the Lindsey Street spur road (B) without associated junction improvements at Lindsey Street (A)/Palmers Hill. This approach does not meet Highways England's 'Standards for Highways' (2017) guidance for displaced large vehicle traffic and will not be implemented by the Highway Authority. **This option is NOT RECOMMENDED**
- c. Agree to the scheme proposed by Essex County Council. The proposed scheme will help address 35 years of discussions surrounding proposals to reduce damage to the Green and improve the landscape around the War Memorial. However, the improvement will also deliver the key changes to traffic arrangements likely to be required in order for the road network to accommodate potential future development at the nearby Stonards Hill site. This option is **RECOMMENDED**.

Proposals

- 11. It is proposed that the dedication of 45m² of Forest land for junction improvements at Lindsey Street (A) / Palmers Hill be approved as this dedication will both meet junction safety requirements and reduce erosion to Forest verges.
- 12. The new junction dedication will also secure the compensatory closure to vehicular traffic of 105m² of the spur road Lindsey Street (B) in front of the War Memorial which is to be replaced with 60m² of surfaced footpath and a compensatory 45m² of Forest Land grassland.
- 13. Both of the above proposals will be subject to specifications that are to be agreed with the Superintendent and City Surveyor. While this arrangement will decisively address a long-term problem on Epping Town Green to the satisfaction of all parties, the arrangement may also facilitate future development that may occur on land at Stonards Hill.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- 14. **City of London Corporate Plan:** the proposal meets the Corporate Plan's vision of providing modern, efficient and high quality local services and maximising the opportunities and benefits afforded by our role in supporting London's communities.
- 15. **Open Spaces Department Business Plan:** the proposal meets the Open Spaces Department's Business Plan Vision by preserving and protecting our world class green spaces for the benefit of our local communities.
- 16. **Forest Transport Strategy:** The primary aim of the Epping Forest Transport Strategy is to investigate and identify options in order to improve safety and accessibility for Epping Forest users. The proposal meets one of the key aims of the Forest Transport Strategy by reducing fragmentation of the Forest.

Implications

17. **Financial:** Apart from legal costs, there should be no financial implications for the City Corporation in dedicating land to improve the highway network. Terms would be offered that would include all highway construction and future maintenance costs being borne by Essex County Council, while Epping Town Council will be responsible for the new area of Town Green. Given the overall benefit to the Town Green it is proposed to waive the City's reasonable legal costs to demonstrate the City Corporation's support for this scheme.
18. **Legal:** Section 33(1.) (iv.) of the Epping Forest Act 1878 provides the Conservators with the necessary powers to 'dedicate roads to the public'.
19. **Property:** Dedication of Forest Land at the junction of Lindsey Street / Palmers Hill will urbanise this part of Epping Town Green. As part of the overall proposals, the dedication now sought should be conditional upon Essex CC securing compensatory arrangements and undertaking suitable works, and this being documented to protect the City Corporation's ownership and interests.

Conclusion

20. The Superintendent has been unable to secure the Committee's aspirations to close Lindsey Street spur road (B) without compensatory improvements to the Lindsey Street (A) and Palmers Hill junction. New proposals for Epping Town Green at Lindsey Street (A & B) address community concerns that have been the subject of discussions between the City Corporation, Epping Town Council, Epping Forest District Council and latterly Essex County Council for over 35 years. The scheme which involves no loss of Forest Land, will see improvements to both the Green and the context and setting of the War Memorial, which will be funded and managed by Essex County Council through the Local Highway Partnership at no significant cost to the City Corporation or the Town Council

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Plan – Highway Improvements at Epping Town Greens
- Appendix 2 – Autotrack around new junction

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