

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Epping Forest and Commons	20 11 2017
<b>Subject:</b> Request for Highway Dedication on Forest land at Gilbert's Slade, Woodford New Road (SEF 29/17)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Open Spaces & Heritage	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Sue Rigley – Land Agency Officer	

### Summary

The London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) intends to replace the existing uncontrolled crossing on Woodford New Road (A104) with a signalised pedestrian and cyclist crossing, known as a Toucan crossing. This crossing will improve connections between two areas of Forest Land Walthamstow Forest and Canada Plain to the West and Gilberts Slade to the East meeting one of the Forest Transport Strategies five ambitions for safe crossing points across the public highway.

In order to make best use of the new crossing, it is proposed to relocate a nearby bus-stop and construct a new footway on Forest Land to connect the new signalized crossing with the bus-stop, the existing Forest path into Gilbert's Slade, and St Peters Path on the Walthamstow Forest side of the Woodford New Road.

Your Committee is asked to consider a request by the LBWF to dedicate for highway purposes approximately 66m<sup>2</sup> of Forest Land in order to relocate an existing bus-stop also on Forest Land at Woodford New Road and to provide a new footway on Forest Land from the bus-stop to connect to the new signalised pedestrian and cyclist crossing. The relocation of the bus-stop permits the return to Forest land of a previously licenced area of 32m<sup>2</sup> resulting in a net loss of 34m<sup>2</sup>.

### Recommendation(s)

#### Members are asked to:

- Approve the dedication to public highway of approximately 66m<sup>2</sup> of Forest land at Woodford New Road in favour of the London Borough of Waltham Forest for the relocation of a bus-stop and installation of a footpath and associated infrastructure upon suitable terms to protect the City's interests to be agreed by the Superintendent and in exchange for suitable compensatory land.
- Instruct the Comptroller and City Solicitor to undertake any necessary documentation.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. The bus-stop on Forest Land at Gilbert's Slade on the A104 Woodford New Road has been at this location for at least 45 years. See Appendix 1.
2. Due to the poor drainage at this location, a Wayleave was granted to LBWF in 1973 for the hard surfacing of this bus-stop with hoggin extensions to either side of the bus-stop to make it less intrusive in the context of the Forest.
3. A further wayleave was granted in 1981 to London Transport for the installation of a bus shelter at the bus-stop.
4. Your Committee of x adopted the Forest Transport Strategy (FTS) (2009) to manage the impact of public highways on the Forest. One of the five guiding principles of the FTS is proposals to reunite sections of the Forest dissected by roads by encouraging the Highways Authority to install safe crossing points.

### **Current Position**

5. The A104 Woodford New Road is a very busy main road, dissecting the Forest at Gilbert's Slade and Walthamstow Forest. Traffic is fast (40mph) and constant throughout the day. The Woodford New Road connects the North Circular Road with Lea Bridge Road and is heavily used road.
6. One of the main walking routes to the nearby 1,300 pupil Forest School, crosses the Woodford New Road via a pedestrian refuge island crossing outside St Peters Church. This links with a well-worn Forest track into Gilbert's Slade which gives access to a network of un-surfaced footpaths within the Forest.
7. The next nearest pedestrian crossing point on the Woodford New Road is a zebra crossing sited approximately 235 metres south of the proposed crossing.
8. Reflecting the ambition of the FTS, the Friends of Walthamstow Forest have presented a petition to LBWF signed by over 250 people requesting improved crossing facilities to improve road safety and to improve links to the two areas of Forest enabling walkers and cyclists' greater use and exploration of the Forest.
9. The scheme and petition were also reported in an edition of the Waltham Forest Echo newspaper. See Appendix 2.
10. To accommodate the necessary footpath and signalling and to also meet up with the existing Forest track into Gilbert's Slade the bus-stop on Forest Land on the east side of the road (Gilbert's Slade) needs to be relocated. The bus-stop is currently opposite the Empire Lounge Nightclub where there is no highway land available for the crossing to be installed due to the existing entrance and exit of the nightclub.

11. LBWF has requested permission to relocate this bus-stop and install a footpath measuring approximately 33 metres in length and 2 metres in width on Forest land at Gilbert's Slade as there is not enough highway width available. LBWF are asking for 66m<sup>2</sup> of Forest land to be dedicated for highway purposes.
12. The Forest land where this bus-stop is currently located measures approximately 32m<sup>2</sup> and this land will be reinstated as Forest land. There will be a net loss of 34m<sup>2</sup> of Forest land.
13. LBWF has submitted an application for the Toucan crossing to Transport for London (TfL) which has been officially accepted and TfL will now begin the design. If your Committee agrees to dedicate the Forest Land for highway purposes, it is hoped that the crossing will be installed in early 2018.
14. The Forest at Gilbert's Slade is part of the Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) / Special Area for Conservation (SAC). The construction works will constitute 'operations likely to damage the special interest (OLDS) and LBWF will need to seek Natural England consent before any works take place.
15. Officers are currently developing a policy approach in relation to further highway dedication requests and are seeking compensatory land from the Highway Authority in relation to each dedication.

## Options

16. There are two options available to your Committee:
17. **Option 1** – Agree to the request for the dedication of approximately 66m<sup>2</sup> of Forest Land for the relocation of a nearby bus-stop currently on Forest land and for the installation of a footpath and associated infrastructure required for a new signalized pedestrian and cycling crossing. Dedication terms can be offered to ensure the proposed footpath is a resin-bonded gravel surface to the Superintendent's satisfaction, reflecting the proximity of the footpath to Forest Land at Gilbert's Slade, and to also ensure the reinstatement of Forest Land where the bus-stop currently sits. **This option is Recommended.**
18. **Option 2** – Refuse the request as the additional infrastructure will increase the urbanisation at this location. Refusal by the City Corporation for such a high profile scheme which would improve access for the local community and Forest users could cause reputational damage for the City of London Corporation if deemed to be unreasonable. **This option is Not Recommended.**

## Proposals

19. It is proposed to agree to the request by LBWF for the dedication of Forest Land for the relocation of a bus-stop and the installation of a footpath and associated infrastructure on Forest land at Gilbert's Slade. This will facilitate the delivery of

an FTS objective of safer crossing points enabled by the installation of a signalized crossing on the busy Woodford New Road, ensuring a safer crossings reuniting two parts of the Forest for many users through an easier access route into the Forest.

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

20. **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.
21. **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.
22. **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 providing improved accessibility to the Forest for all users especially those arriving by public transport on foot and for cyclists.

## Implications

23. **Financial:** There should be no financial implications for the City Corporation in dedicating land for public highway purposes. Terms would be offered that would include all highway construction and future maintenance costs being borne by LBWF, together with the removal of the current bus-stop and reinstatement of the Forest Land it is located upon.
24. **Legal:** Section 33(1)(iv.) of the Epping Forest Act 1878 provides the Conservators with the necessary powers *'to maintain and make roads, footpaths, and ways, and to dedicate roads to the public...'*. The Comptroller & City Solicitor has previously advised that dedication is preferable to the use of wayleaves.
25. **Property:** LB Waltham Forest is seeking a dedication of 66m<sup>2</sup> Forest land to use for highway purposes and is suggesting that it repositions an adjacent bus stop and surrender 32m<sup>2</sup> of Forest land from a previous licenced scheme as part of the overall proposal. If the City Corporation is minded to approve the new request, LBWF should be asked to confirm that it will return the licenced land to the Forest when the new dedication is made. The dedicated area of 66m<sup>2</sup> may also be considered together with the Superintendent's land bank proposals that are being submitted for consideration.

## Conclusion

26. The City Corporation needs to strike an appropriate balance between requests by Highway Authorities where the safety of pedestrians has been identified and the duty to protect Forest Land. While the progressive urbanisation of Epping Forest and the damage to tranquillity remain a concern the overall impact of the additional highway infrastructure at this location will be minimal and will help realise an important FTS objective.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Location
- Appendix 2 – Waltham Forest Echo Newspaper

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