

Committee:	Date:
West Ham Park Committee	05 Feb 2018
Subject: Extension of Nature Area at West Ham Park	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
<p style="text-align: center;">Summary</p> <p>West Ham Park currently contains two wildlife areas that are enclosed to provide a refuge for wildlife and a dedicated area for outdoor educational activities to take place. Both areas are in increasing demand from local schools, but a balance is required between using the spaces and providing a rest period to ensure that habitats are not detrimentally disturbed. In order to accommodate large school groups and lessen the impact of increasing number of sessions on existing habitats, an extension to the nature garden on the eastern edge of the park is proposed. This would result in the parks Wild Schools officer being able to deliver more sessions linked to the 'Science programmes of study' from the National curriculum of England (2013).</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the use of 1500m² of open parkland to extend the existing nature garden to provide an increased area to accommodate school groups and other outdoor educational activities. 	

Main Report

Background

1. West Ham Park is a 77 acre (31 hectare) public park and is the largest park situated in the London Borough of Newham in East London. It was acquired by the City of London in 1874 under a Conveyance which states that the City shall maintain it forever 'in a proper and ornamental condition as open public grounds and gardens for the resort and recreation of adults and as a playground for children and youth'. Today, it is a Victorian style urban park and contains a number of amenities and facilities as well as providing a habitat for wildlife. West Ham Park is currently designated as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation.
2. The area to the rear of East Lodge (see Map, Appendix 1) was fenced off from the general public for a number of years before being developed in to a wildlife garden in 2010. A pond and pond dipping platform, insect hotel, vertical log piles, natural woodchip path, 'bug hunting' area and 10 wooden seats were added to create a number of different habitats which provide a valuable wildlife education space for local schools.

Current Position

3. The nature garden has been well utilised over the past 7 years and is a popular resource with local primary schools. The National curriculum of England (2013) includes 'Science programmes of study' for children aged 5 to 7 years old. The Key stage 1 programme includes plants and animals, with children being taught how to identify and name a variety of both wild and garden plants, including deciduous and evergreen trees and common animals. Key stage 2 develops a deeper understanding of living things and their habitats. The garden forms a natural outdoor classroom for these subjects where students can engage and learn directly from the environment.
4. The pond was refurbished during the autumn of 2017 as it was becoming silted up with leaf debris and the liner had become punctured. New aquatic plants and marginal species were planted by the Friends of West Ham Park during a volunteer maintenance session on the 29th October. Deadwood piles around the garden's perimeter have also been increased to provide additional habitat for insects.
5. The garden is approximately 720m² and can accommodate groups of 10-15 children for various activities including pond dipping. The space has been popular with school groups but can't accommodate a full class of 25-30 children at one time. This means that the class has to be divided into two groups with additional tasks, resources and individuals required to support the second group. It also means that increased pressure is put on this small space over a short period of time and the garden is left to 'rest' after usage to ensure that ecosystems are not impacted.
6. The area between the Nature Garden and Nursery gate is currently made up of amenity grassland, with a number of trees. Nursery gate is one of the quieter entrances in the park with only 9% of users choosing to enter here. A line of 5 Plane trees is present along the boundary of the park with Upton Lane. These are in declining health and have had their canopies reduced several times in recent years. The City's tree contractor advises that they would benefit from mulching at the base to help alleviate compaction issues.

Proposals

7. Permission is sought to extend the nature garden by 1500m² (see Appendix 2) in order to create a larger wildlife area for classes of school children to engage with a number of different habitats. When proposing and designing the garden we have been mindful of the fact that two further capital projects are currently being developed for the park that are adjacent to this site, the refurbishment of the playground and the future of the Nursery Site. The proposal for the new wildlife garden (see Appendix 3) has been created in partnership with the Learning team and the Wild Schools officer based at West Ham Park. The main features and benefits are listed below:
 - a. A dead hedge of approximately 50m will form a new perimeter to the garden. Hedge and tree cuttings from West Ham Park would be used to create it, with the aid of volunteers. The hedge would provide a valuable habitat for birds and hedgehogs. The ongoing maintenance of

the hedge could also be used in 'wilderness' sessions with older children.

- b. The creation of two areas of standing deadwood. Two trees are due to be felled due to their age and condition. The trunks of these will be kept on site and can be utilised in the garden, along with additional pieces of native deadwood. Dead and decaying wood provides habitat and/or food source for lichens, fungi, bryophytes and a vast array of invertebrates, hole nesting birds and mammals. By increasing the number of dead wood piles in the garden the pressure impacted by insect bug hunts and other investigation sessions with the children can be shared across the larger garden space, reducing the impact on any one area and reducing the resting period required for the garden in between school sessions.
 - c. A new path would be created through the garden to allow different zones to be defined. Mixed native coppice and woodland style under planting would be added to the central area, to create a small woodland habitat. The change from amenity grass land to mixed woodland planting will increase the array of plants in this space and therefore increase the number of species that it supports. Coppicing techniques could also be demonstrated to children with the opportunity for older secondary school children to learn and assist with the management of this area.
8. The creation of these habitats and the increased size of the garden will provide a much more engaging environment to teach schools not only about habitats but also literacy. Creative writing and storytelling forms an important part of early years education. Creative writing often involves a child writing detailed descriptions and the ability to place themselves in the position of the character or person they are writing about or writing to. The increased size of the garden enables children to become more immersed in the space and develop their own stories.
9. The Conservation Management Plan (2011) for West Ham Park included the proposal to move the leaf dump from the centre of the park to the area now being proposed for the extension of the wildlife garden. There are a number of issues associated with moving the storage compound to this location such as low hanging tree canopies and poor access for larger vehicles (that would be required to remove rubbish and recycling from compound) which make this location more suitable to a wildlife area than a storage compound.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

10. This event would support the City's Core Values of
- a. The best of the old with the new – by repurposing this piece of land within the park we will be better serving our local communities through the outdoor educational sessions that we can deliver which will introduce children to wildlife and historic landscape management practices such as hedge laying.

11. The event would support the City's Corporate plan 2015-19 strategic aim to provide valued services, such as education, employment, as well as key policy priorities KKP4 and KPP5 in terms of the garden impact on local communities.
12. From an Open Spaces perspective the event will support the departmental objective of;
 - a. Enriching the lives of Londoners by providing high quality and engaging, educational and volunteering opportunities (OSD3)
13. Newham Biodiversity action plan produced by the London Borough on Newham in 2010, identifies a number of key species for Public Open Spaces which would benefit from the creation of additional habitats described above such as woodland birds , bees, greater stag beetles, butterflies, hedgehogs, bats, reptiles.

Implications

14. **Financial implications:** Much of the material required will be obtained from on-site arisings, for example tree and hedge cuttings will be used to make the dead hedge and trees that have been felled on site will be used for the log piles. A small budget will be required for the woodland coppice and under planting which will be met from West Ham Park's local risk budget.
15. **Legal implications:** Contained within the body of this report.

Conclusion

16. The team currently provides an active programme of outdoor educational activities in the park, but is limited to the amount of wildlife sessions it can run due to the size of its existing wildlife gardens. The proposal to increase the size of the Nature garden on the eastern edge of the site would provide additional habitats to allow more outdoor educational sessions to be delivered, linked to the National Curriculum's 'Science programmes of study' Key Stage 1 and 2. The Conservation Management plan had identified this area for the relocation of the storage compound. Given the density of trees around the perimeter of the area it is felt that deliveries and collections to and from the site would be challenging and detrimental to existing tree health. Therefore it is proposed that the site be better suited to use as a wildlife garden.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Map of West Ham Park, highlighting the location of the Nature Garden
- Appendix 2: Aerial photograph of the garden and proposed extension
- Appendix 3: Wildlife garden extension proposal

Background Papers:

- Science Programmes of Study: key stages 1 and 2 (2013) Department for Education
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425618/PRIMARY_national_curriculum - Science.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425618/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_Science.pdf)

Lucy Murphy

West Ham Park Manager

T: 020 8472 3584

E: lucy.murphy@cityoflondon.gov.uk