

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest Consultative Committee	13 June 2018
Epping Forest and Commons	15 May 2018
Subject: Proposal for Experimental Traffic Regulation Order on Fairmead Road, High Beach in partnership with Essex Highways (SEF 32/18)	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces and Heritage	For Discussion
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Summary

The Epping Forest Transport Strategy (2009-2016) proposed the closure of selected minor roads within Epping Forest to reunite areas of Forest previously dissected by highways, making more of the Forest both tranquil and safety accessible to the public. The proposal to close Fairmead Road was modified in September 2013 to leave 500m (42%) open to motor traffic to retain access to the Fairmead Bottom Car Park. The partial closure has seen fly tipping and Anti-Social Behaviour previously experienced along the length of the road concentrated across the remaining 500 metres open to motor traffic.

This report proposes the introduction of an e Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) on the remaining section open to motor traffic to extend the benefits seen upon the 700m of highway closed under a Traffic Regulation Order in 2012, to the entirety of the road length.

This action would improve visitor experience, increase safety for the Forest cattle and enhance protection of the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and SAC (Special Area of Conservation).

The ETRO would be in place for a proposed 18-month period and would cost the City of London Corporation circa £2,000 for the drafting of the ETRO + additional gate installation costs estimated at £3,000, these costs would be offset by the reduction of staff time required to maintain the area. Should the ETRO meet expectations in providing the positive improvements outlined, the full closure of Fairmead Road to vehicular traffic would be considered as the next step. As part of such a closure it would be proposed that the road would be safeguarded as an historic route through the Forest, providing a multi-user pathway for walkers, horse-riders and cyclists, whilst allowing the enhancement of the habitats of the ancient Fairmead.

Recommendation(s)

Consultative Committee Members are asked to support:

- approval for the 18-month Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) at Fairmead Road in line with the aims of the Epping Forest Transport Strategy and in partnership with Essex Highways;
- approval of the preparation of a report on the ETRO at the end of the trial period to assess the impacts of the measure on the Forest and to consider future action;
- approval of the development of costed proposals, for the permanent closure of Fairmead Road as a highway for vehicular traffic, as part of the negotiated Mitigation Strategy for Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation.

Main Report

Background

1. Fairmead Road, High Beach, is a 1,200m stretch of public highway dating back to perhaps the 14 Century (Essex Highways) that leads into the interior of Epping Forest. The route was closed as a through-route by means of a point closure of the highway in the 1970's. Since then its function as a highway has been limited and its condition and maintenance have declined.
2. Given the relative narrowness of the Forest, the importance of Fairmead as one of the Forest's remaining ancient open grassy plains and its protected status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the full closure of Fairmead Road to vehicular traffic was proposed in the adopted Forest Transport Strategy (2009 – 2016), approved by your Committee and Essex County Council in 2008.
3. The closure of Fairmead Road was highlighted in the Forest Transport Strategy (FTS) both in Section 2 on Route Management, aiming to reduce the impact of traffic on the Forest, and in Section 5 aiming to use road closures to enhance both the protection of the Forest and the access opportunities for visitors, including horse-riders and cyclists (see map extract at **Appendix 2**).
4. This FTS formed an important part of the Heritage Lottery-funded *Branching Out* Project, of which Essex County Council Highways was a co-funder and important stakeholder. As part of the *Branching Out* Project 700m of the road between the Epping New Road (A104) junction (opp. The Warren/Epping Forest HQ) and Fairmead Oak car park was subject to a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO)

restricting use by motor vehicles. This resulted in 500m of the highway remaining open to motor vehicles, allowing the anti-social behaviour, visual disturbance of the natural aspect and damage to the SSSI/SAC to continue but in a more condensed space.

Traffic monitoring

5. Traffic Monitoring over a period of 216 days between 20/01/2017 – 29/10/2017 conducted by the Conservators discovered that an average of 56.6 vehicles accessed Fairmead Oak Car Park or reached the highways termination per day. Around 1/3 of all vehicle visits occurred during the hours of darkness and when the car park (Fairmead Oak) is locked closed to Forest visitors. Interruptions in monitoring and the end of the observation period were a result of vandalism to the traffic recording equipment.

Current Position

6. The closure of the 700m of Fairmead Road between Epping New Road and Fairmead Oak Car Park has had a demonstrably marked improvement on the Forest, allowing pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists year-round access to the Forest without the disturbance by motor vehicles. This has also improved the natural aspect of the Forest as furniture such as gates and posts installed to restrict vehicle access onto the Forest have been removed, leading to a more pleasing look of the area.

Anti-social behaviour

7. The Anti-Social Behaviour that used to occur along the entire length of the open highway has now been condensed to the 500m of unrestricted highway and Fairmead Oak Car Park. The Anti-Social Behaviour includes: fly-tipping, littering, theft from Forest visitor vehicles, vandalism of Forest furniture, damage to trees through vandalism or arson and drug related activity: use/distribution. The area is also a known and popular Public Sex Environment (PSE).

Options

8. There are three options available to your Committee:
9. **Option 1** – The introduction of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) to restrict motorised vehicle access along the first 500m of Fairmead Road, High Beach. This would bring the remainder of this route in line with the current Road Traffic Order in place on the 700m of highway between Fairmead Oak Car Park and the Epping New Road and would also meet the objectives of the approved Forest Transport Strategy, that was adopted by Essex County Council Highways.

10. The proposed duration of the ETRO would be the maximum 18 months so a better assessment of the impacts on the Forest can be observed and recorded. This 18-month period will also allow the City Corporation to monitor the effect of the closure on visitor experience and the possible displacement of any anti-social activities to other areas. **This option is Recommended**
11. **Option 2** – The City Corporation does not apply for the introduction of an ETRO, allowing the continuation of motorised vehicle access along the first 500m of highway, but action the closing of Epping Forest car parks: Fairmead Road East/West and Fairmead Oak, in an attempt to restrict anti-social behaviour to the public highway. **This option is Not Recommended**
12. **Option 3** – The City Corporation do not apply for the introduction of an ETRO, allowing the continuation of motorised vehicle access along the first 500m of highway and keep all car parks within the area open. This would allow the difficult to control anti-social behaviour to continue. **This option is Not Recommended**

Proposals

13. It is proposed to apply for an ETRO on the first 500m of Fairmead Road High Beach, through negotiation Forest Visitors will still be able to access 'Hill Wood Car Park' and the 'Original Tea Hut' but only within the trading hours of the 'Original Tea Hut' 0900hrs -1700hrs approx. This will require the installation of a gate(s) at the junction of Fairmead Road and Cross Roads, High Beach.
14. Another gate will need installing beyond the exit of the Hill Wood Car Park (50m from the junction) to ensure continued vehicular access is ceased. If this double gate system is not installed it is very likely that fly-tipping will still occur on the open 50m of highway, which will impact on the car park availability and the business of the City Corporation tenant: The Original Tea Hut. Pedestrian access, especially for horse riders will be observed in these gate installations in line with British Horse Society 'standards and best practice' (at least a 1.5m opening).
15. There will be a need to continue permissive access along this 50m section of highway for City Corporation vehicles & Emergency Services vehicles, so there will be no option of increasing car park capacity at Hill Wood Car Park which services the 'Original Tea Hut'.
16. Following the 18-month trial period of the ETRO, it is proposed that a report is brought to your Committee with a review and assessment of the impacts of the closure. Should the trial meet expectations your Committee could consider a scheme for the permanent exclusion of vehicular traffic from this route. This would be the outcome envisaged in the approved Forest Transport Strategy and would provide a significant new length of multi-user pathway to enhance the enjoyment of visitors to this part of the Forest, including walkers, horse-riders and cyclists.

17. The costs associated with future adoption and maintenance of this route for Forest visitors would be negotiated with Essex County Council Highways and Epping Forest District Council as a key part of the Mitigation Strategy for the protection of the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation from the impacts of the residential development in the forthcoming Local Plan.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

18. **City of London Corporate Plan:** the proposal meets the Corporate Plan's vision by ensuring that our sites are secure and clean.
19. **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.
20. **Forest Transport Strategy:** The primary aim of the Epping Forest Transport Strategy is to investigate and identify options 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

21. The original application to close the road in its entirety to motorised vehicles was proposed in the 2009 Epping Forest Transport Strategy. The campaign to stop the installation of cattle grids, another FTS objective has undoubtedly overshadowed other objectives within the FTS. The main 3 objections to the entire closure of Fairmead Road were:

- Access to Forest interior for visitors with mobility issues
- The use of the road for safe horse unboxing and boxing
- The future availability of the closed road for the riding of horses.

The route management proposals (Appendix 1) indicate that the City Corporation improvements for mobility at Connaught Water, High Beach and Knighton Wood provide good provision in the local area for visitors with mobility issues. Similar proposals, within the forthcoming Visitor Access and Car Parking Strategy, will provide dedicated Unboxing/boxing sites in the locality.

Health Implications

22. There are no foreseeable health implications associated with this proposal.

Conclusion

23. The introduction of an ETRO on the 500m of highway open to all traffic will bring significant benefits in line with the 700m of highway closed to traffic in 2012. Visitors will benefit from traffic free access into the Forest, free from the anti-social behaviour which is known to take place at the location. The City Corporation is likely to see a reduction in costs associated with this anti-social behaviour. This action will also see an improved protection of the SSSI, SAC and cattle grazing programme. Previous objections have been addressed and alternative access arrangements, where appropriate, proposed through mitigation measures. Following the experimental period, the impacts of closure will be reviewed with a view to recommending a permanent closure to vehicular traffic should the trial meet its objectives.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Route Management Proposals Fairmead Road, High Beach
- Appendix 2 – Section of Figure 2 from the Epping Forest Transport Strategy (2009 – 2016)

Background papers

- Report to Epping Forest & Commons Committee November 2008: *Forest Transport Strategy* (SEF 36/08)
- The Epping Forest Transport Strategy – proposals 2009-2016. City of London and Essex County Council.

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