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Epping
Forest

Registered Charity

Route Management Proposals

Fairmead Road, High Beach

INTRODUCTION

Fairmead Road, High Beach, is a 1,200m stretch of public highway that leads into the interior of Epping Forest. The highway is an important heritage feature in that it pre-dates the Epping New Road (Turnpike Trust) which was created in 1834 and is clearly depicted on the Chapman and Andre Map of Essex of 1777.

Fayreamead Road was probably constructed between 1611-22 as part of wider links between Loughton and Epping, before coming under the control of the Epping Highway Trust in 1768 (Victoria British History). It is possible that the route has earlier associations with the New or Fayreamead Lodge built in 1378 as a point of entry to the New Lodge Hunting Chase.

The highway remained a public thoroughfare from the Epping New Road, opposite The Warren (Epping Forest Offices) to Cross Roads, High Beach until the 1960s when it was closed at the Warren junction, due to safety concerns associated with the poor visibility from the junction angle. The road remained a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile cul-de-sac or 'dead end' until 2012.

As part of the Epping Forest Transport Strategy (FTS) (2009-16), Essex County Council as the Highway Authority, in partnership with the City of London Corporation made changes under the Objective 2 - Route Management element of the FTS to make 700m of the road between The Warren junction and Fairmead Oak car park subject to a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) restricting uses by motor vehicles. The long term ambition was to return this section of road via a 'Stopping Up' Order to Epping Forest. The remaining 500m of road between Fairmead Oak Car Park and the junction with Cross Roads remained as a C or minor road. (see enclosed map).

'The Original Tea Hut' which has been situated (in various forms) upon Epping Forest Land within 50m of the Cross Roads junction for the past 80+ years is the only business present on Fairmead Road. The road does not provide access to any residence or inclusions within the Forest.

The parts of Epping Forest either side of the highway are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as a Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2010 as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

There are three Epping Forest Car Parks situated along the open section of highway, two of them have a small capacity of around five vehicles each, whilst Fairmead Oak Car Park which is situated at the end of the highway has a capacity of around 20 vehicles.

TRAFFIC DATA

The Conservators of Epping Forest installed a Sensor Data Recorder (SDR) Traffic Counter on Fairmead Road. The counter was in operation from the 20th January to the 29th October 2017 (282 days). The counter was operational for a total of 216 days (76.6%) during this period. The missing 66 days were the result of frequent vandalism directed at the SDR unit.

The data counter recorded a total of 12,229 vehicles during the period. Which is an average of 56.6 vehicles per day. From this figure it can be assumed that at least 432 of these visits are a result of Epping Forest Staff opening and shutting the car park. It is also reasonable that Epping Forest Staff checking on cattle welfare which makes up around 100 counts. This leaves a total of 11,697 visits (54.2 per day).

3,905 of the recorded vehicle visits were in the hours of darkness, this represents 33.4% of total visits and 18 visits per day. As Fairmead Oak Car Park is routinely locked by Epping Forest Staff prior to sunset and after sunrise, it can be presumed that these are not genuine Forest visitors.

RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Although, the part closure has resulted in a demonstrably marked improvement for the Forest; SSSI/SAC and its visitors along the closed section of highway, the Forest surrounding the still open 500m of highway continues to suffer the same issues present prior to the closure, but now in a more condensed area.

Fly-tipping and litter

The isolation of Fairmead Road, makes it an ideal location for anti-social behaviour. In 2016 and 2017 there were 12 and 15 fly-tips respectively collected by the Conservators from Forest Land adjacent to the highway. These figures do not include fly-tips removed by Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) and Essex Highways as a result of fly-tips deposited on the highway. These fly tips have included large HGV-based dumps of building waste and tree stumps (January 2015) which have left the road closed to traffic

As the Traffic Data results indicate the area is extensively utilised by vehicles at night which may deter potential fly-tipping incidents. However, the volume of litter dropped within the area is extensive. Currently, time spent litter picking the accessible highway area of Fairmead Road equates to 2 hours per week, which is a total of around 100 hours per year. This represents a cost to the Conservators of £4,000 per annum. The area is picked by volunteer litter pickers on a regular basis. The litter mostly consists of takeaways/fast food containers, condoms/sex-related litter and drug-associated waste, together with nitrous oxide containers.

Public Sex Environment (PSE)

The high volume of sex-related litter indicates that the area is regularly used as a Public Sex Environment (PSE). The absence of street lighting; lack of through traffic and ability to visually survey additional traffic from a distance all contribute to Fairmead Road popularity as one of the Forest's 12 PSEs. Fairmead Road is heavily promoted on adult websites including swingingheaven.co.uk; thedoggingconnection.com and adultfriendfinder.com.

Anti-social behaviour

The unrestricted night time access to the area results in various forms of anti-social behaviour in addition to the litter problem. Fires, vandalism of Epping Forest Infrastructure (gates, posts, SDR unit) and trees are a regular occurrence in the area. In 2017, the replacement of damaged materials cost £600. Burnt out cars have also caused damage to trees which have been left permanently scared or have needed felling due to safety concerns.

Criminal Activity

There have been incidents of criminal activity recorded in the area: in 2015 there was a spate of vehicle break-ins, drug dealing and drug deposits have been witnessed and discovered by Epping Forest Staff, poaching of rabbits by dogs has been reported to the Epping Forest Office as well as the fly-tipping incidents.

Damage to Forest Land

Due to the narrow width of Fairmead Road ($\approx 4\text{m}$) the passing of cars along the 500m of the highway the open to all traffic has led to degradation of the Forest edge, the majority of this section is devoid of vegetation and heavily rutted in places, this situation is exacerbated in the winter as vehicles attempt to avoid waterfilled pot holes. Damage has also been caused to trees along the edge of the highway by HGVs and other large vehicles accidentally accessing the road believing it to be a through road.

Conservation Cattle Grazing

The accessible by highway section of Fairmead Road also includes an area of the Epping Forest Grazing program the high volume of food waste and prophylactics poses a significant risk to cattle through accidental ingestion. It is proposed in 2018 that up to 30 head of cattle will be turned out into the Forest at this location, each animal has an average worth of around £900-1000, this does not include disposal costs/vet bills resulting from accidental ingestion.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

The original application to shut the road in its entirety was proposed in the 2009 Epping Forest Transport Strategy. This proposal was objected to locally on the grounds of access to the Forest interior for those with mobility issues. The resulting part closure in 2012 has seen a vast improvement to the lower section of the highway which is now utilised by pedestrians including

horses and bicycles who are able to enjoy safe traffic free access through this section of the Forest. The surface of the restricted section of highway is also significantly better than the open 500m section which is badly pot holed. The risks are still present as mentioned above.

The three main objections to the FTS Route Management objective both focused around a variety of public access-based issues.

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

Access to the Forest for visitors with mobility issues

The majority of Epping Forest's 58 car parks are located alongside busy A or B roads. Unusually, the section of Forest around the lightly trafficked minor road leading to Fairmead Oak car park consists of open grass plains, offering the visitor tranquil and picturesque views across the Forest. The car park can provide visitors with mobility issues the opportunity to enjoy quiet access deep inside Epping Forest. Conversely for visitors elsewhere in the vicinity walking from Hillwood and Bury Wood the same car park offers an unwelcome urban intrusion into an otherwise open area of pastoral Forest scenery. It should be noted that since February 2018 the perimeter of the car park has been fenced with cleft chestnut fencing which does obstruct the view of the Forest from a stationary vehicle.

The Fairmead Oak car park forms part of the Epping Forest District Council Lifewalk network, a walking for health group supported by the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group as part of a network of 32 walk locations across the District. In 2018/19 16 Lifewalk activities planned from the Fairmead Oak car park, these have an average attendance of around 20 people.

The 2.25 mile level B Life walk, does not provide infrastructure at the site to improve access into the Forest for those with accessibility issues. There are however level designed paths and access routes, with disabled access bays situated at High Beach Visitor Centre which is situated 0.7 miles away, Connaught Water 1.6 miles away and Knighton Lane 2.6 miles away (see enclosed map). A visit by the City Corporation's Head of Access did not believe that the closing of Fairmead Road or was in contravention of the Equality Act 2010 as it was not targeting any particular group of people, the condition of the existing highway surface is extremely poor and there are no surfaced rides adjoining the open section of highway or the associated car parks.

As part of the Equality Impact Assessment conducted on Fairmead Road by the Conservators, improvements have been made at High Beach Visitor Centre to improve entrance access onto the Easy Access Path to an Equality Act 2010 compliant standard.

At Connaught Water commitments have been made by the Operations Manager to assign budget to repair the 1km access path. The Conservators are also in discussions with the Environment Agency to investigate measures to alleviate flooding issues at the site.

The closing of the road up to 50m from the Cross Roads junction will result in the redundancy of the three car parks and parking provision of around 30 vehicle spaces.

The use of the road for safe horse unboxing and boxing

Horse riders felt that the quiet road provided an ideal location for the safe unboxing and boxing of horses. The Visitor Access and Car Parking Strategy which is currently under development will propose improved facilities for horse riders at Rushey Plain Turnaround, High Beach and Bury Road, Chingford. This may even take the form of dedicated parking areas for this purpose.

Rushey Plain Turnaround – incorporates an area of around 1000m² (40x25m), but the current car park layout does not best utilise this space. The proposal of the Conservators is to remove the central vegetation island within this car park, formalise the shape of the car park and improve security. There is capacity within this design to designate the area for the safe use of horse boxes. The car park is within the SSSI, however plans to improve the car park, access to the surface ride and measures to protect important features such as the veteran beech in the south western side of the car park have been approved by Natural England. The cost of these improvements have been quoted at £21, 815 + VAT, but would have the additional benefit of improved facility and security.

Chingford Plain – the licencing of the Spencer Group Ltd at Bury Rd has resulted in a new 2000m² area of type 1 hardstanding within the extension car park, this will provide an improved and safe facility for boxing in horses, especially at weekends.

The future availability of the closed road for the the riding of horses

Many of the objections to the proposed complete closure of Fairmead Road were from members of the horse riding fraternity concerned that the right to ride horses along the closed highway would be removed, though removal of this access was not proposed in the FTS. The campaign to stop the installation of cattle grids, another FTS objective has undoubtedly overshadowed other objectives within the FTS. The Traffic Regulation Order present on the highway only impacts motorised vehicles. Horseriding groups including the Epping Forest Riders Association (EFRA) and the Byways and Bridleways Trust are concerned that the loss of any highway status might lead to the City Corporation withdrawing the right to ride in this area outside the Open Riding season. The City Corporation recognises the heritage importance of maintaining a trackway that may date back to as far as 1378 and duties under the Epping Forest Act to provide public recreation and enjoyment by recognising the important use of Fairmead Road by walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

The Epping Forest and Commons Committee may wish to consider issues associated with:

Future Maintenance Costs of Fairmead Road

A stopping up order for the Highway at Fairmead Road would help address FTS objectives in reuniting the Forest divided by roads and providing compensatory land for Forest Land lost to Highway Schemes such as road widening, laybys etc. The removal of the road or the future maintenance of a road would face the City of London with additional costs where budgets remain under significant pressure.

The confirmation of lesser Highway rights such as Restricted Byway, cycleway or Bridleway would leave the highway maintenance responsibility with the Highway Authority and would provide a guaranteed right to riders that the route could be used throughout the year, irrespective of the Horse Riding Licencing Scheme.

Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO)

An experimental order is like a permanent traffic regulation order in that it is a legal document which imposes traffic and parking restrictions such as road closures, controlled parking and other parking regulations indicated by double or single yellow line etc. The Experimental Traffic Order can also be used to change the way existing restrictions function

An Experimental Traffic Order is made under Sections 9 and 10 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984

An experimental order can only stay in force for a maximum of 18 months while the effects are monitored and assessed. Changes can be made during the first six months of the experimental period to any of the restrictions (except charges) if necessary, before the Council decides whether or not to continue with the changes brought in by the experimental order on a permanent basis.

It is not possible to lodge a formal objection to an experimental traffic regulation order until it is in force. Once it is in force, objections may be made to the order being made permanent and these must be made within six months of the day that the experimental order comes into force.

If feedback or an objection is received during the period that suggests an immediate change to the experiment that change can be made and the experiment can then proceed.

If the experimental order is changed, then objections may be made within six months of the day that the experimental order is changed.

In most scenarios an 18 month ETRO period is requested, this is then reviewed at 6 months and following this review a decision is then made to proceed to a permanent Traffic Regulation Order.

It is proposed to apply for an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (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. 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 of London 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).

There will be a need to continue access along this 50m section of highway for City of London vehicles, this is so Forestry Operations can utilise the roadway to access the Forest in order to

reduce increased damage to the surfaced rides by heavy machinery, other City of London vehicles will require access for survey work, patrolling and cattle monitoring/movements. Emergency Services vehicles will also require access (there is fire hydrant at the end of Fairmead Road known as 'Palmers Bridge'. Due to the necessity of this access there will be no option of increasing car park capacity at Hill Wood Car Park which services the 'Original Tea Hut'.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – Next Steps

The Conservators of Epping Forest will be utilising part of Fairmead Oak Car Park as a cattle handling area from Mid-February 2018.

Further route management of Fairmead Oak to Cross Roads Road Section.

Through its Local Highways Panel Essex County Council are proposing an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) to be installed on Fairmead Road for a 6 month period followed by a review. This will allow an adequate period to assess the impact of closing Fairmead Road to 50m from the Cross Rds junction.

If the ETRO trial was successful the route could then be reduced in status to a Restricted Byway. While this arrangement would not return ≈5000 m² of land to the Forest it would not pose a new maintenance liability to the City Corporation. The quoted cost of repairs to the currently open to all traffic section of highway is £27,500 + VAT.

OUTLINE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

1. Closure of Fairmead Oak Car Park
2. Preparation of the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order
3. Preparation of press statement
4. Pre-closure photos and site assessment to be made
5. Review date report.