

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Epping Forest Consultative Epping Forest and Commons	13 06 2018 09 07 2018
<b>Subject:</b> The Jubilee London Plane Avenue, Woodford Green: Future Management Proposals (SEF 27/18)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Open Spaces and Heritage	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Geoff Sinclair, Head of Operations, Epping Forest	

### Summary

The report outlines the main findings of an arboricultural assessment of the 89 tree Jubilee avenue comprising alternating Black Poplar and London Plane on Forest Land at Woodford Green. The pollarded Poplars are near the end of their lifespan, while the longer-lived London Plane have not established well and are of poor form and will be increasingly susceptible to Massaria Disease in the future.

The assessment makes recommendations for the long-term management of the Jubilee Avenue which would require Local Authority Conservation Area consent. The extent of the required arboricultural interventions on the existing avenue suggest that the most effective method of maintaining this landscape feature would be the staged felling and replanting of the Avenue, at a cost of £20,000 over ten years. The report also recommends that public consultation should be undertaken on the naming of the avenue and the form and species of replacement trees, together with a public sponsorship scheme to fund the replanting.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to approve:

- Public consultation on a staged approach to replacing the Jubilee Avenue, as set out in option 5, to maintain as much visual continuity as possible;
- Public consultation on the choice of replacement species based on a shortlist of appropriate native hardwood species: English Oak, Hornbeam and Common Lime;
- Public consultation on whether the Jubilee Avenue should be formally renamed the Churchill Avenue given its clear association with the Churchill statue;
- The establishment of a sponsorship appeal to raise funds to meet the cost of replacement trees and their management.

## Main Report

### Background

1. Land at Woodford Green was acquired by the City of London Corporation on 1 May 1882 and has been held in trust as part of Epping Forest. On acquisition, the 39.5 acres (16ha) of greenspace were surrounded by open fields, which were subsequently subject to late Victorian and Edwardian residential development.
2. A distinctive landscape feature bordering and crossing Woodford Green is a network of tree avenues with two main north-south running tree avenues:
  - a. Woodford Green Chestnut Avenue – a 1.9 km avenue of originally 191 Horse Chestnut Trees stretching between Burlington Place to the north of Woodford Green to Broomhill Walk near the A119/A104 junction to the south of Woodford Green
  - b. The Jubilee London Plane Avenue – known locally as the ‘Churchill Avenue’ an avenue of 89 remaining London Plane (*Platanus acerifolia*) and hybrid Poplar (*Populus spp*) running between Broadmead Road (A1009) on the north and High Road (A119) to the south.
3. Tree avenue planting has been a significant feature of British rural and urban landscapes. Avenues were first planted in the 16th century to provide shaded walks close to large houses. By the 17th century, more ambitious schemes crossing parks or forming an approach to a feature or vista became more common. Charles Bridgeman’s 1720 Lime Avenue at Stowe Landscape Park and more locally George London’s 1710 avenues at Wanstead Park are the culmination of the avenue planting fashion. Tree avenues remained a popular feature until the mid-nineteenth century, enjoying a brief revival in late Victorian period civic schemes to celebrate the Monarch’s Jubilees and avenues of honour linked to military campaigns.
4. The current avenue replaced an avenue of 79 Black Poplars originally planted in 1886 to mark Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee of 1887. This earlier avenue had been allowed to grow to maturity, however, in 1966/67 following an incident of a branch falling close to a child your Committee decided that given the propensity of Black Poplar to shed limbs the avenue would need to be replaced. The felling of the 1886 avenue proved highly contentious with a vigorous local campaign challenging the need to fell the trees. This proved unsuccessful and the 1880 avenue was felled, and the current avenue replanted in 1967.
5. The intention was for the current avenue to be comprised of London Plane trees and these were planted at 40 feet intervals. With a lifespan of 400 years the London Plane was chosen for its ability to be longer lived than the original Black Poplars, which are fast growing and become over-mature more quickly with the attendant tree safety concerns.
6. To encourage the upward growth of the London Planes, and to establish an avenue effect quickly, hybrid Poplar trees were planted as ‘nurse trees’ in

between the London Plane trees. The intention was that the Poplars would be removed once their role as a nurse tree had ended at around 20 years of age. Unfortunately, the Poplars were never felled, and they have grown to maturity to dominate the avenue, while the London Plane has not established well and are much smaller and of poorer form.

7. On the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1997 your committee agreed to reducing the size of the Poplars by 50%. This was to allow room for the London Plane to develop as fine specimens and to maintain a full avenue in the process. The sudden removal of the Poplars was advised against as it was feared that this might expose the London Plane to wind damage which would inhibit their development and detract from their visual impact. Subsequently the tops of the Poplar were cut off at around 6m with a further episode of crown reduction carried out two-thirds of the way up the regrowing stems arising from the initial 6m cut level. This second phase of work was likely to have been seeking to alleviate the weight of the crown but without resorting to a complete re-pollard to the 6m level which would have left the trees considerably disfigured. This work was in contrast to the proposal in the October 1997 reports where repollarding every 2-3 years was recommended.
8. The Jubilee Avenue is within the Woodford Green Conservation Area established in 1970 by the London Boroughs of Redbridge and Waltham Forest. The Avenue forms a backdrop to the Grade II listed Winston Churchill statue at the Junction of High Rd (A1199) and Broomhill Walk. The statue was erected in October 1959 and listed in 2016. The lines of the 1967 avenue was modified to ensure it was better aligned to the statue than the earlier avenue. As a consequence of these changes the avenue has become more associated with Winston Churchill than with the Jubilee of Queen Victoria and is now locally known as the Churchill Avenue rather than the Jubilee Avenue.
9. The Woodford Tree Avenue is in an amber tree safety zone and is surveyed every three years for arboricultural actions required. At the last survey in 2016 eight Poplar trees (14% of the total) were identified as requiring complete repollarding. As well as these eight trees, it was considered that the remaining trees will increasingly require similar arboricultural interventions to manage the risks posed by them and that this would start to have a highly visible adverse effect on the aesthetics of the avenue.
10. There are recognised design criteria that affect the visual impact of tree avenues, with proportion being a key consideration. Tall narrow avenues with dense foliage such as the Jubilee Avenue can feel imposing, and uninviting, or even threatening or unsafe. Wide avenues with short trees will be ineffectual and fail to make impact on the landscape.
11. The current avenue could be argued as too tall and dense for its width, largely a result of the unplanned growth of Poplar.
12. The disease, commonly known as Massaria disease (*Splanchnonema plantini*), infects branches of plane trees. The fungus has usually been considered to be a weak parasite causing only minor damage, such as twig dieback, in warmer Mediterranean climates. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it has been found

associated with branch death and rapid decay within other parts of Europe. There are over 600 London Plane trees forming avenues in Epping Forest, typically alongside roads. The weakening of branches by the disease so that they are increasingly likely to fail has become a significant management concern. Between 2016 and 2017, Epping Forest arborists had to work between 10 and 20% of the Plane trees along roadsides, following specialist inspections, to make the trees safe. Given the impact of Massaria disease the planting of new Plane trees is no longer envisaged.

## **Current Position**

13. The City of London Corporation commissioned Islington Tree Service in 2016 to prepare an arboricultural assessment report on the current tree condition and the management options available for the Jubilee Plane Tree Avenue (Appendix 1). The following report outlines the main findings of the 2016 Islington report and makes recommendations for progressing the long-term management of the Jubilee/Churchill Avenue while relating any proposed changes to possible longer-term management needs of the avenue more generally.
14. The 58 hybrid Poplar trees and 31 London Plane trees were surveyed on the 22nd January 2016 by Islington Tree Services. The hybrid Poplars were found to be generally uniform in size with stems of between 450mm to 600mm diameter and canopy spread of 10-15m and a height of 15-20m. Many of the trees have attained a large size with limbs of elongated form that are heavily end weighted and with poor attachment. If left to grow without management, the trees would pose a high risk of crown failure and constitute a significant hazard to pedestrian use of the avenue path
15. The large diameter of the regrowth necessitates that any crown reduction is best undertaken so that trees are cut back to the 6m high cut level. Continuing with the higher tier reduction would require repollarding on a cyclical basis of approximately five years in order to maintain the trees with low hazard stable crowns. Given Poplar's relatively poor ability to withstand decay indicates that either management option, due to the significant wounds cutting will cause, are not long-term solutions for sustaining a prominent tree avenue in this location. Equally, either management option will result in substantially reduced stature trees of relatively poor form and again eroding the aesthetic appeal of the avenue
16. Unfortunately, in comparison to the Poplars, the 31 existing London Planes have established poorly and are of disparate size and do not offer any prospect of being suitable for promotion to long-term avenue trees, especially given the presence of Massaria disease in Epping Forest.
17. **Tree Avenue Management Options** - Six management options were outlined in the report:

Option 1: no action.

Option 2: Pollard crown reduction of all avenue trees (Poplar and London Plane).

Option 3: Pollard crown reduction of all Poplars and fell all intermediary London Planes.

Option 4: Fell and replant entire avenue.

Option 5: Fell and replant entire avenues in stages.

Option 6: Establish new avenue alongside the existing avenue.

18. Option 1 No Action – Given the City Corporations obligations under the Occupiers Liability and Health and Safety at Works Acts this option is unrealistic. **The option is not recommended.**
19. Options 2 & 3 Pollard Crown reductions - Due to the relatively short 50-60-year lifespan of Poplar trees and the current poor arboricultural condition of the trees, it is proposed that we should focus on management options that looked to establish a successor avenue. **These options are not recommended.**
20. Option 4 Fell and replant the entire avenue - The avenue is located in an area with a network of impressive mature tree avenues. Despite the presence of the nearby Chestnut Avenue, the loss of the Jubilee Avenue in one operation would remove a much-appreciated landscape feature which also forms the backdrop to the Grade II listed Winston Churchill statue with perhaps three decades until a sufficient backdrop is established. **This option is not recommended.**
21. Option 5 Fell and replant the avenue in stages - The staged replacement of the avenue, is the option which best facilitates the long-term replacement of the avenue with more long-lived and disease resistant species, while reducing tree safety issues and retaining the best aesthetic solution. **This Option is recommended.**
22. Option 6 Establish a new avenue alongside the existing avenue - There is insufficient space to establish a new avenue alongside the current one that meets the needs of complementing the Grade II listed Winston Churchill Statue. **This option is not recommended.**

## Proposals

23. In progressing any regeneration option for the avenue, a key requirement is to ensure the new planted tree has the best conditions to establish and grow quickly. As well as good maintenance, the site conditions need to be appropriate for the species chosen. When interplanting within established tree avenues there is a need to ensure there is sufficient light reaching the planted tree. Established mature trees respond quickly to light gaps and their crown quickly grows into gaps potentially increasingly shading the planted trees 15-20 m below.
24. To progress Option 5, it is therefore proposed that a two-phase approach is required as outlined in Table 2. The duration of the process will be determined

by the growth of the establishing trees but is likely to be in the order of 10 or so years. This approach would see two adjacent trees on each row felled and the resulting gap planted with a single replacement tree. Felling would be staggered between the two tree rows. Felling two trees on a row will ensure sufficient light reaches the new planted tree to ensure it can establish and thrive.

25. Under Option 5 the retained Poplar trees will be repollarded, as once they are exposed to a more open environment their canopy will become predisposed to wind damage.

**Table 2: Proposed Replacement for the Woodford Poplar Avenue**

One example of phased replacement of a two-row avenue									
Avenue - Phase 1		* = retain trees				○ = fell trees			
		*	*	○	○	*	*	○	○
		○	○	*	*	○	○	*	*
Avenue - Phase 2		○ = fell trees				■ = new tree planted in phase 1 in spaces between trees felled			
		○	○			○	○		
				■	■			■	■
Avenue - Structure on completion of Phase 2		■ = tree planted phase 2				■ = tree planted final phase			
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Felling two trees and replanting one should allow enough space and light for the unrestricted growth of young trees into the canopy of the avenue.									

26. Existing main avenue tree species in the Woodford Green Conservation Area are now considered unsuitable as replacements for both disease and arboricultural reasons. The selection of a new avenue tree species for the Jubilee Avenue may in due course influence the species chosen to replace the remaining avenue trees within the Conservation area.
27. Because of the dominance of the Site of Special Scientific Interest and the Special Area of Conservation which favours the natural regeneration of native species Epping Forest does not have a species-based tree planting policy. However, where specific planting initiatives have been made at Gaunt Wood, the Trafalgar planting and most recently Gifford's Wood, selection has been made from the traditional Epping Forest 'palette' of Oak, Beech and Hornbeam. Beech is increasingly less favoured in new plantings in relation to concerns regarding climate change adaptation.
28. Potential species appropriate for the location and which fit Epping Forest's native woodland conservation perspective would include:
  - i. English Oak (*Quercus robur*)
  - ii. Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*)
  - iii. Common Lime (*Tilia x europaea*)

29. These species are however broad, spreading trees and not best suited to narrow avenues for the design reasons discussed above. It is not possible to widen the current avenue sufficiently to allow more balanced proportions and it may be appropriate to consider using upright cultivars, for example *Quercus robur* Fastigiata or *Carpinus betulus* 'Frans Fontaine', or to consider planned management techniques, such as pollarding, to provide for an avenue that presents the Grade II listed statue of Winston Churchill to best effect.
30. To reflect the reorientation of the Jubilee Avenue on replanting in 1967 to face the Churchill Statue, and the consequent local practice of referring to the avenue as the 'Churchill Avenue', it is proposed that a public consultation be undertaken on formally renaming the Churchill Avenue.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

31. **Legal** – The Epping Forest Act 1878 under section 33(1)(i) provides the City Corporation with powers 'To fell, cut, lop and manage in due course the timber and other trees, pollards and underwoods, and to sell and dispose of the timber cuttings and loppings, and to receive the proceeds, and to plant trees and shrubs for shelter or ornament'. In exercising powers in relation to planting the Conservators shall not do anything that would materially take away or hinder the exercise of rights of common (sub-section 2).
32. The avenue is within the Woodford Green Conservation Area. Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Consequently, tree management is subject to oversight by the London Borough of Redbridge as the Local Planning Authority, with six weeks prior notice required to be given to them of the proposed felling and other tree works. This enables the Local Planning Authority to decide if any of the trees should be made subject to a Tree Preservation Order. Those carrying out works to trees should ensure they do not contravene laws protecting wildlife and must have a regard to statutory obligations concerning protected species.
33. **Financial** – The cost of replanting the Jubilee Avenue is estimated at £20,000 spread over ten or more years but with two periods of main financial outlay when trees are planted. There is a considerable potential to secure local sponsorship of the planted trees otherwise operational costs would be met through the Epping Forest Local Risk budget. It is proposed that tree felling and arboricultural interventions will be undertaken by in-house staff and which is estimated will take four weeks to complete.
34. **Communications:** Previous works in this area have attracted significant public comment and concern. Prior to any works commencing extensive liaison with local stakeholders, including the local planning authority, should be undertaken to identify and address issues of concern.

### **Conclusion**

35. The poor establishment of the 1967 avenue and increasing tree safety concerns have resulted in the need to consider the felling and replacement of the Jubilee Avenue in the Woodford Green Conservation Area. A phased approach to replacing the avenue is proposed to minimise the overall landscape disruption.
36. The choice of replacement species; tree form and avenue naming will be subject to public consultation with local stakeholders with the suggestion that a shortlist of the following appropriate avenue species be presented: English Oak, Hornbeam and Common Lime. Public engagement will also consider whether the avenue should use *fastigiata* or upright growth forms or to consider pollarding as a long-term management option to ensure an avenue achieves the best design proportions.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 - Woodford Green Avenue Arboricultural report, Islington Tree Services

## **Background Papers**

Price, Colin (2009), Epping Forest Avenues Report

The Report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest' dated 02 September 1966

The Report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest' dated 07 October 1966

The Report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest' dated 13 October 1997

## **Geoff Sinclair**

Head of Operations

T: 020 532 1010

E: [geoff.sinclair@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:geoff.sinclair@cityoflondon.gov.uk)