

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest Consultative – For Consultation Epping Forest and Commons – For Decision	29 01 2020 10 03 2020
Subject: Wanstead Flats Individual Site Plan SEF 03/20b	Public
Report of: Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
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Summary

A Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest for the period of 2020-30 is being developed alongside a 2020-23 Business Plan. Given the relative size of the Forest and the marked variety of the landscapes and habitats, there is a need to describe the discrete management of key areas.

This report outlines the Individual Site Plan (ISP) that has been prepared for Wanstead Flats. The property management context and significant management considerations described in the ISP have been outlined, along with the management strategy proposed for the area.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- i. Approve the Wanstead Flats Integrated Site Plan for public consultation

Main Report

Background

1. On the 11 March 2019, it was reported to your committee that a Strategy and Management Plan for Epping Forest for the period of 2020-20is being developed. As part of the development process, existing operational activity in key geographical locations and for key activities is being reviewed.
2. The review process comprises an audit of the City Corporation's (COL) property management issues alongside other significant management considerations, to provide an overview of current practice and an outline of longer term aspirations.
3. This report outlines the Individual Site Plan (ISP) for Wanstead Flats that has been prepared as part of the review.

Current Position

4. Wanstead Flats forms the largest of the thirty-eight management compartments that comprise Epping Forest and is protected by the Epping Forest Act 1878. It is an area of open acid grassland, sports pitches, heath, scrub, woodland, scattered trees and waterbodies, located at the southern end of Epping Forest.
5. Wanstead Flats has a number of statutory designations and is a hugely important resource for the people of northeast London, both for its provision of sporting facilities and also for the opportunity to experience a natural environment within urban surroundings. It is one of the few breeding sites for Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) in London and is a notable stop-off for migrating birds. It has a long and well-documented local history and is easily accessible on foot and by public transport from the surrounding communities.
6. Significant predicted housing growth is planned in the local area with consequent additional visitor pressure. The current absence of visitor facilities means that Wanstead Flats is better suited to local short duration visits. The environmental impact of existing visitors is currently adversely affecting important aspects of the biodiversity on Wanstead Flats. The additional visitors resulting from increases in local housing numbers may be detrimental to the special nature of the Flats and to the population of Skylarks, which are vulnerable to disturbance from people and dogs.
7. The Wanstead Flats ISP seeks to define the management and mitigation that will be required to address future threats to the special nature of Wanstead Flats and presents a strategic work program to ensure a sustainable future for the conservation and heritage interest of Wanstead Flats, along with its immense recreational value.

Proposals

8. The ISP first outlines the property management context at Wanstead Flats, followed by the significant management considerations impacting on the area, before presenting a management strategy and outline management program. A more detailed operational work activity plan is presented in the appendices, along with an indicative management map and additional background information.

Management Strategy

9. In addition to the need to discharge its obligations with respect to property management context, the ISP identifies a 10-year management strategy for Wanstead Flats, summarised as follows:
 - a. to identify a program of conservation measures that will contribute towards improving the condition status of the Wanstead Flats SSSI;
 - b. to ensure that COL offers a visitor experience to Wanstead Flats that meets the needs of the communities today and into the future, in a sustainable and welcoming way;

- c. to finance an Infrastructure Improvement Program from increased income generation originating from Wanstead Flats;
- d. to further encourage existing local community involvement in the management and enhancement of the environment of Wanstead Flats; and,
- e. to seek to mitigate the impact of additional visits from new developments within Epping Forest SAC's Zone of Influence (which includes the whole of Wanstead Flats), through a range of measures, including improved landscaping and alternative routes and destinations, alongside more and improved interpretation.

Management Considerations

10. There are a wide range of management considerations given in the ISP and these have been summarised below:

- a. Ecological: Acid grassland, which is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitat, represents a large part of the site which is not sports pitches, and this habitat is being adversely impacted by recreational pressure, air pollution, scrub encroachment and the decline in grazing. The nationally declining Skylark, a bird of conservation concern, breeds in the long acid grassland areas of Wanstead Flats, but breeding success is negatively impacted by disturbance from people and their dogs. Notwithstanding scrub encroachment onto acid grassland areas, the scrub habitat is itself important for bird and invertebrate species for breeding, shelter and food, such that a balanced approach to scrub management is required. Wanstead Flats has two large waterbodies (Alexandra Lake and Jubilee Pond). Water quality and supply are notable concerns for both waterbodies;
- b. Heritage and community: Wanstead Flats has a distinctive history and heritage that is well-documented. The western part of Wanstead Flats was historically part of the landscape of the Wanstead Park Estate, listed as Grade II* on Historic England's *Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest*. Remnants of that landscaping are still in evidence today, notably the 1764 'Evelyn Avenue' in Bush Wood and five large veteran Sweet Chestnut trees in Bush Wood, which are around 300 years old. Between 1852-1878, Wanstead Flats played a significant part in the eventual securing of Epping Forest for the nation. The Flats also have a notable World War II legacy, and WWII remains are still in situ. There is a strong tradition of community involvement, with many different community groups serving the varied interests of their members;
- c. Football provision: The provision of football pitches at Wanstead Flats dates to 1890 and is the second largest provision of football pitches for community use at a single location in Europe. The Wanstead Flats football provision is of invaluable importance to the surrounding local communities; four leagues and two soccer schools operate at Wanstead Flats on 44 pitches. The Corporation of London heavily subsidises football provision on Wanstead Flats, with a loss for every pitch booked.

- d. Access/Local Plans: Wanstead Flats is easily accessible on foot and by public transport from the surrounding local communities and is one of the most visited locations in Epping Forest. The visitor infrastructure is under capacity to cope with current use and there is a strong potential for additional increase in visitor pressure from planned housing development; and,
- e. Anti-social Behaviour: Wanstead Flats is adversely impacted by most of the anti-social behaviour problems experienced at Epping Forest. Successfully responding to these issues will be an important aspect of the future management of Wanstead Flats.

Property Management Context

11. The main property management issues, additional to the normal actions such as tree safety management which are undertaken through the Forest, and for which action will be required at Wanstead Flats have been identified as:
- a. Fire Risk: Wanstead Flats has a history of periodic and at times large fires;
 - b. Statutory Designations: The northern part of the central section of Wanstead Flats, between Lake House Road and Centre Road, is designated a *Site of Special Scientific Interest* (SSSI). The compartment was assessed by Natural England (NE) in January 2010 as ‘unfavourable – recovering’;
 - c. Invasive / Alien Species: There is a heavy infestation of New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) in Alexandra Lake. Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) is increasingly prevalent on the many open grown oaks across the site and poses a risk to human health. A large proportion of the London Plane tree avenues on Wanstead Flats are coming to the end of their natural life and, additionally, suffer from *Massaria* fungal disease, which causes sudden branch drop;
 - d. Utilities: The Beckton desalination pipeline crosses Wanstead Flats from the southeast to the northwest, with COL required to keep the wayleave clear of woody vegetation;
 - e. Infrastructure: Jubilee Pond was relined in 2013, with a new waterproof liner installed. A number of biotic and abiotic factors have resulted in significant bankside erosion of the pond and the islands, which has potential to compromise the effectiveness of the new liner. Several measures to protect the bank have been trialled and have had mixed success.
 - f. Properties: Wanstead Flats has football changing rooms at three locations. The Harrow Road changing facilities were upgraded in 2009. Those at Aldersbrook Road and Capel Road have reached the end of their design life. They are currently in a poor condition, do not meet current FA guidelines for separate accesses to changing and toilet facilities, and do not comply with the Equality Act (2010). They are also costly to heat and provide hot water and are inefficient to maintain. The Capel Road changing rooms also suffer from a leaking flat roof and will require upgrading in the near future.

Outline Management Program and Operations Plan spreadsheet

12. The ISP presents a 5-year outline management program which is then further detailed in Appendix 1 of the report (see the Operations Plan spreadsheet). This will be reviewed and updated yearly to monitor the progress of the management program and ensure that it continues to deliver the outcomes set out in the 10-year management strategy.
13. As well as works to be undertaken using existing resources, potential enhancement projects requiring additional support are also identified.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

14. City of London Corporate Plan 2018 - 2023: the restoration and maintenance of the internationally and nationally important habitats of Epping Forest directly underscore the *third pillar* of the Corporate Plan, which is to “*shape outstanding environments*”. The development of ISPs form part of the operational planning to achieve this aim of the Corporate Plan.
15. Open Spaces Department Business Plan 2020-21: The Strategic Vision of this plan is to ‘We enrich people’s lives by enhancing and providing access to ecologically diverse open spaces and outstanding heritage assets across London and beyond.’ and one of the Department Objectives is to ‘Open spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible.’ The preparation of the Epping Forest Management Strategy and Management Plan for 2019-30 is a key action in the Departmental Business Plan.
16. No negative equality impacts were identified for this proposal, with the prospect of improved accessibility for people with some disabilities and parents with young children.

Financial Implications

17. The outline management program has been framed to fit within existing levels of local risk spend at Wanstead Flats.
18. Several projects have been identified which will only be progressed if additional financial and practical support can be obtained.

Legal Implications

19. Section 3 of the Epping Forest Act 1878 states that Epping Forest shall be regulated and managed under the Act by the Corporation of London as Conservators of Epping Forest. Subject to the provisions of the Epping Forest Act 1878 the Conservators are under a duty at all times to keep Epping Forest uninclosed and unbuilt on as an open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public. They are also under a duty at all times as far as possible to preserve the natural aspect of the Forest.

Charity

20. Epping Forest is a registered charity (number 232990). Charity Law obliges Members to ensure that the decisions they take in relation to the Charity must be taken in the best interests of the Charity and within its powers.

Epping Forest Consultative Committee

21. The EFCC asked how the public were to be consulted on regarding the ISP. Each ISP is prepared in collaboration with key local stakeholders who have a good local working knowledge and involvement with the site concerned. Following consultation with the EF & CC and approval by the EFCC a wider collective of stakeholders will be sent a copy of the ISP for their information. This wider collective of stakeholders are identified in each ISP and will vary with each site.

Conclusion

22. An Individual Site Plan (ISP) has been prepared for Wanstead Flats. This identifies the legal and statutory context and other significant management considerations that should be considered when approaching the management of this area, and which have drawn on the consultation and support of local stakeholders to develop.
23. A management strategy for the next 10 years is presented along with an outline management program and detailed work proposals. These proposals highlight works that can be achieved through existing Local Risk resources, but also where additional support will be required.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Wanstead Flats Individual Site Plan

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