

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest Consultative – For consultation Epping Forest and Commons – For decision	21.10.2020 16.11.2020
Subject: The Grotto, Wanstead Park: Conservation Management Plan SEF 22/20	Public
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Summary

The Grotto was constructed within the designed landscape of Wanstead Park as an ornamental building known as a folly, during the height of the 18th Century Picturesque Movement. The building originally consisted of a boathouse and a first floor shellwork entertaining room possibly with servant quarters at the rear. Constructed between 1769-64 by the second Earl Tylney, the building was subsequently listed Grade II in 1954, within a wider Grade II listing for the Registered Park and Garden, which was revised to Grade II* in 2001. Following a devastating fire in 1884 which destroyed much of the building, The Grotto façade has been retained as an enigmatic ruin which continues to be a popular focal point in Wanstead Park, as well as an important remaining component of the designed Parkland landscape.

The condition of the remaining elements of the Grotto are now at a point where significant interventions are required to ensure their future, with the folly being added to the Heritage at Risk Register in 2017. This report outlines the conclusions of the Grotto, Wanstead Park Conservation Management Plan prepared by Alan Baxter Ltd (Appendix 1). It is recommended that the plan be adopted as a resource to guide the management, fundraising planning and investment decisions of the Wanstead Park Project Board.

Recommendation(s)

Consultative Committee Members are asked to: -

- i. Note the report
- ii. Offer any comment on the Grotto, Wanstead Park Conservation Management Plan for consideration at the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

Main Report

Background

1. Wanstead Park is East London's oldest public park and considered to be London's greatest surviving designed waterscape. At its most extensive (circa 1800) there were nine artificial lakes within the Park. Five lakes remain today and form a cascade with the lower four lakes administered by the City of London Corporation.
2. Following a spectacular decline in the 1820s, followed by 60 years of neglect a substantial proportion of the Park and Out Park were added to Epping Forest by the City Corporation between 1876 and 1880. Other parts of the original Park were later purchased by the London Borough of Redbridge and the Wanstead Sports Ground Limited. The City Corporation originally managed the acquisition as a formal Public Park under its 'ornamental grounds' power, before changing the management approach post-1945 to fully revert the site as part of Epping Forest
3. The Park has been subsequently listed as a Grade II* – 'a garden of special interest' - Registered Park and Garden (RPG) by English Heritage (now Historic England) in 2001, following an earlier Grade II designation in 1987 and has been on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register (HARR) since 2009. In 1954, the Grotto and the Temple were designated as Grade II Listed Buildings, while in 1970 the Wanstead Park area, including parts of Overton Drive, was designated as a Conservation Area. The Wanstead Park Conservation Area was added to the HARR in 2010 while the Grotto was separately added to the HARR in 2017.
4. The Grotto is one of a series of follies – buildings built primarily for decoration - constructed in the Park between 1760 and 1764 by the 2nd Earl Tylney, acting as both a boat dock and shellwork entertaining room possibly with servant quarters at the rear. Grottos were natural or artificial caves which formed a decorative feature within a number of large 18th century gardens. The Grotto is located on the banks of the Ornamental Water, the largest and lowest lake in the cascade, in the eastern section of Wanstead Park. It is an enigmatic focal point situated at the boundary between the more formal early eighteenth-century landscape and the more naturalised, Picturesque, later eighteenth-century landscape. It is considered emblematic of the Park's important eighteenth-century phase of landscape design and has been a notably popular feature in the Park for visitors, both in its 18th Century heyday and for people today.
5. Only two years after it was acquired by the City Corporation the Grotto was severely damaged by a fire, which destroyed the internal rooms and left only the front façade and a few other sections of the building standing. The structure was insured for £1,000, considerably less than the cost of £2,000 for the materials alone spent in the 1760s, and it was subsequently decided by the City Corporation not to restore the Grotto.
6. The general impression of the extant Grotto structure today is that it is in a poor condition, the result of vandalism and continued decline despite various

consolidation schemes instigated to safeguard the remaining elements of the Grotto. Richard Griffiths Architects' reported on the repair and reuse of the Grotto in 2011 for the City Corporation and identified fourteen areas of concern with the Grotto Structure. Significant unknowns are the nature of the foundation of the façade wall and how the fluctuation of the water level in the Ornamental Waters affects the stability of the wall.

7. Alan Baxter Ltd were commissioned in November 2018 to liaise with key stakeholders and prepare a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the Grotto. The CMP approach has been developed by Historic England and the National Heritage Lottery Fund as a tool to help manage change in historic features, bringing together an understanding of what matters and why, and how to conserve and manage it. From this informed basis, plans are then used to develop programmes of repair, restoration or to draw up proposals for change
8. This report outlines the CMP prepared by Alan Baxter Ltd and presents recommendations on the next steps to be taken

Current Position

9. Wanstead Park is presently the focus of four significant project streams for the City Corporation and the other Park landowners, with the management of the Grotto sitting alongside these projects, namely:
 - a. *Heritage Management*: On the 18th November 2019, your Committee approved the Wanstead Park Parkland Plan which set out a management approach to help move towards the removal of the Park from the HARR.
 - b. *Large Raised Reservoirs*: In November 2019, after a 3-year hiatus, the Environment Agency informed the City Corporation that three of the reservoirs at Wanstead Park that hold more than 25,000 cu m of water above ground level are to be revised following a national reassessment of large raised reservoirs to a 'High Risk' Category. The implications of this change form part of an Engineering assessment being undertaken by the City Corporation's Department of the Built Environment (DBE) and was completed in September 2020.
 - c. *Flood Alleviation Scheme*: The City Corporation is a significant riparian landowner in relation to the River Roding. To better manage the flood risk in the Roding catchment at South Woodford and Wanstead, the Environment Agency is proposing the construction of a £7.5 million Flood Storage Scheme (FSS) on farmland at Ongar. The Environment Agency expects the cost of the scheme to be part-funded by riparian owners including the City Corporation on a discretionary non-statutory basis. The London Borough of Redbridge has pledged £517,000 towards the project.
 - d. *Water supply*. Detailed hydrological assessments undertaken by specialist engineers have shown that there is insufficient natural water to keep the lakes filled. Water losses from leakage and evaporation outstrip the amount of water entering the lakes and if we did not pump water into the lakes, they would ultimately be much reduced in size, if not lost. We have been advised that increasing pressure for drinking water in London could

lead to increased restrictions on our ability to pump water into the lakes. Finding a solution to this issue is an important longer-term management challenge that underlies much of the Parks future development proposals

10. A Wanstead Park Project Board was established by the Director of Open Spaces and the City Surveyor in summer 2019 to coordinate the City Corporation's response to these significant project streams.
11. The Grotto, Wanstead Park: Conservation Management Plan (CMP) is provided in full, at Appendix 1. The aim of producing the CMP is to help the City Corporation to remove the Grotto from the HARR and to help determine a successful and sustainable future for the Grotto.

Conservation Management Plan

Overview of the CMP

12. The Grotto Conservation Management Plan provides a comprehensive and interdisciplinary evaluation of the Grotto today, including a summary of existing knowledge about its historical development (Chapter 3) as well as a consideration of its current condition and ecology. This information was then shared with both internal and external stakeholders, (Chapter 2) as well as discussed at two workshops, both of which helped to clarify the requirements for removing the Grotto from the HARR and to outline a proposed medium-term solution for the Grotto's future. A series of recommended policies and an action plan to help the City Corporation to achieve this end are set out in Chapter 5.0 and Chapter 6.0 respectively.

Significance of the Grotto

13. The cultural importance of the Grotto was assessed using criteria set out in Historic England's *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (2008). This makes use of four different value groups; Evidential Value, Historic Value, Aesthetic Value and Communal Value (Page 23) with the significance assessment an amalgam of these values. Alan Baxter Ltd added a fifth value, Ecological Value, to their significance assessment process for the Grotto.
 - a. *Evidential Value* (Page 24): The Grotto offers evidence for one of the ways in which historic landscapes were embellished. This is limited by the fact that there are many other similar examples;
 - b. *Historic Value* (Page 24): The historic value of the Grotto primarily derives from its association with the Childs family and the fact that, despite its ruined state, it is one of the few legible reminders of the important mid-eighteenth century phase of landscape design. This is strengthened by two additional factors, the high level of documentation and the juxtaposition with the Temple, a contemporary structure constructed in a contrasting archaeological style;
 - c. *Aesthetic Value* (Page 26): The aesthetic value of the Grotto derives primarily from the surviving legibility of its complex design (especially the

front façade and legibility of the original structure outline (Page 27) and a unique multi-use history;

- d. *Communal Value* (Page 26): The Grotto is one of the most recognisable features of Wanstead Park today with a continuity of interest from the time of the Tylney family to the late 19th century.
- e. *Ecological Value* (Page 26): The Grotto provides ecological niches not found elsewhere in the Park with crevices and cavities in walls, arches and alcoves of particular note for bat roosts.

14. As a landscape and waterscape feature the Grotto's overall significance is fundamentally connected to its setting (Page 28) and it is highly sensitive to changes within it. Historically the setting of the Grotto at the edge of a lake and framed by dark, dense, overhanging tree cover would have added to its sense of mystery and magic. Three developments were identified which have detracted on the Grotto's overall significance:

- a. *Vegetation changes*: Over the last 5-10 years vegetation management has undermined the Grotto's role as a surprising incident that is alternatively obscured and revealed as an observer journeyed around the park;
- b. *Water Level*: The relationship of the Ornamental Water and The Grotto is of fundamental importance to its overall significance with the prolonged low water levels of the lake obsuring this key relationship;
- c. *Galvanised steel fence*: The current fence installed to protect the Grotto from Anti-Social Behaviour undermines visitor's appreciation of the Grotto.

Policy Recommendations

15. A conclusion of the CMP is that the Grotto is at a turning point in its history (Page 33). It is over a century since it was severely damaged by fire and since then the structure has continued to decline alongside the cumulative loss of material undermining the current visitors' appreciation of the Grotto's significance.

16. Working with the key stakeholders (Page 7) to identify a sustainable future for the Grotto and to see its removal from the HARR it was considered that in the medium term the City Corporation should, as far as possible, restore the façade to its eighteenth century appearance. Eight key priorities were identified (Page 33) for the City Corporation to consider:

- a. *Responsibilities and maintenance*: the split management between the City Surveyors and Epping Forest departments of the City Corporation means that careful co-ordination is required in its ongoing management and maintenance.
- b. *Structure and surviving fabric*: the works required to achieve a restored façade needs to be defined further.
- c. *Security*: one of the main concerns throughout the twentieth century has been the security around the Grotto. The location and form of these security measures needs to be carefully considered.
- d. *Accessibility*: it is proposed that the City Corporation should explore opportunities to enhance public access to the Grotto where possible.

- e. *Interpretation and presentation*: A well thought out and creative scheme of interpretation, which places the Grotto in its wider setting and context, would enhance visitors' appreciation of the Grotto's significance.
- f. *Ecology*: careful thought will be needed in order to balance the ecological and heritage significance of the Grotto
- g. *Relationship to the Ornamental Water* (immediate setting): the Grotto was designed to be seen and experienced primarily from the water. The fact that due to low water levels there is little appreciation of this relationship today detracts from the Grotto's significance. Other elements of the Grotto's immediate setting, notably planting and views also need to be taken into account.
- h. *Relationship to Wanstead Park* (wider setting): as part of a designed landscape the Grotto's relationship to the wider Park is an important consideration in its future development and management and should be seen in the context of the wider, future vision for the Park as a whole.

Options

17. Your Committee are asked to consider two options:

- 18. **Option 1**: It is proposed that the Grotto Conservation Management Plan be adopted as a resource by the Wanstead Park Project Board to guide the management of the Grotto.
- 19. The Restoration and maintenance plan (the first item in the above Action Plan table) will produce costed options, all of which should remove the Grotto from the HARR. These options, some of which will help identify potential uses of the property, will be reported to your Committee in due course, along with a recommendation to seek appropriate funding. **This option is recommended**
- 20. **Option 2**: Do not approve the use of the Grotto Conservation Management Plan in planning and developing conservation policies for the Grotto.
- 21. This would prevent progress towards stabilising the current structure with the consequent continued decline of a Grade 2 Listed Building and it will remain on the HARR. **This option is not recommended**

Action Plan

- 22. Each of the eight key priorities were made up of policies with 39 recommendations to the the City Corporation in total. Nineteen of these policies related to additional studies and reports which would contribute to the removal of the Grotto from the HARR. These were compiled into a costed prioritised 'Action Plan' (page 43) summarised in Table 1 below. This identified an essential spend of £57,500 with an annual cost of £2,750 for monitoring fabric loss, an advisable spend of £19,500 and desirable spend of £8,000.

Table 1:

Work Required	Est Cost (£)	Urgency
Restoration and maintenance plan	35,000	Essential
Structural investigations into the Grotto's foundations and historic bridge	20,000	Essential
Installation of CCTV	2,500	Essential
Monitoring loss of historic fabric	2,750/year	Essential
Feasibility Study into different potential uses of the Grotto	TBC	Essential (long-term)
Archaeological and geological recording of loose material	13,000	Advisable
Ecological surveys	4,500	Advisable
BS5837 tree survey	2,000	Advisable
Interpretation boards	8,000	Desirable

23. The remaining 20 policies relate to management procedure and process related to the Grotto, with the first policy being, "The Conservation Management Plan will be formally adopted as policy by the City Corporation as one of the principal sources of guidance in the management of the Grotto".

Corporate & Strategic Implications

24. Open Spaces Department Business Plan: The Alan Baxter Ltd Grotto CMP exercise and background research follow from three of the Open Spaces Department's Strategic aims of: providing high quality accessible open spaces, involving communities in site management and adopting sustainable working practices.
25. Corporate Plan 2018-23: The Alan Baxter Ltd Grotto CMP exercise and background research meets the objective of the Corporate Plan to provide thriving and biodiverse green spaces and urban habitats
26. Statement of Community Involvement: The City of London has consulted on the preparation of the original Conservation Statement for Wanstead Park (2011) and in 2015 consulted on the LDA Wanstead Park: Parkland Plan. The Alan Baxter Ltd Grotto CMP was prepared in consultation with key stakeholders, including The London Borough of Redbridge, Historic England, Natural England, Friends of Wanstead Parklands, The Georgian Group, The Wren Group, London Parks and Gardens Trust.
27. The Grotto is currently not subject to public access. An equalities assessment would need to address access implications once the Feasibility Study was concluded.

Financial Implications

28. An 'Essential' spend of £57,500 has been identified in the CMP. The Cyclical Works Programme (CWP) budget for 2020/2021 has allocated the sum of £65,000 towards these works. Further CWP bids for funding can be made, but with the current reviews of the CWP programme and Capital spending priorities it is likely that your Committee will need to consider wider fundraising opportunities to support any restoration of the building.
29. Grant support mechanisms. The Wanstead Park Project Board are investigating Lottery funding for works in Wanstead Park. Some of this CMP's proposals may be appropriate to form part of any Lottery funding application.

Charity Implications

30. 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.

Legal Implications

31. Subject to the provisions of the Epping Forest Acts 1878 & 1880 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.
32. The Epping Forest Act 1880 includes an additional power at section 5 to maintain "*ornamental inclosed lands*" which most probably reflects the City's purchase of Wanstead Park in 1880 and requires the Conservators to make proper provision for securing the enjoyment thereof by the public for exercise and recreation at all reasonable times during the day.
33. The CMP has been prepared in the context of the Conservators' statutory functions.
34. Apart from general Occupiers Liability Acts responsibilities, there is no specific heritage duty on owners of registered parks and gardens to take steps to have them removed from the HARR. However, taking steps to address the issues which have led to entry on the register is consistent with the Conservators' statutory functions and objects of the charity.

Conclusion

35. It is over a century since the Grotto was severely damaged by fire and since then the remaining structure has continued to decline. The Grotto is at a turning point in its history and there is a pressing need to resolve significant concerns on the structural integrity of the remaining elements of the Grotto.

36. The Grotto is a significant and distinctive element of the Grade 2* Registered Park and Garden Wanstead Park as well as it being a Grade 2 Listed Building. The Park, Grotto and Conservation area have been included in the HARR by Historic England.
37. The CMP prepared by Alan Baxter Ltd, in consultation with key stakeholders, draws together an extensive body of research and identified a medium-term strategy that could with the correct fundraising strategy achieve the removal of Grotto from the Heritage at Risk register. It is therefore proposed that the plan be adopted as a resource to guide the investment decisions and fundraising planning of the Wanstead Park Project Board.

Background Papers

- Richard Griffiths Architects Report on the repair and reuse of The Grotto, Wanstead Park (2011)
- Wanstead Park: Landscape conservation and regeneration progress update. Epping Forest and Commons Committee, 11th May 2015
- Wanstead Park: - Briefing note for Members, Epping Forest and Commons Committee, 11th September 2017
- Wanstead Park: - Briefing note for Members (SEF 38/18), Epping Forest Consultative Committee, 10th October 2018
- Wanstead Park: Conceptual Options Plan and Cost Planning Study – Rev J

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – The Grotto, Wanstead Park Conservation Management Plan, September 2019

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