

Committee(s): Epping Forest Consultative – For Consultation Epping Forest and Commons – For Decision	Date(s): 21 10 20 16 11 20
Subject: Night-time Gating proposals for Manor Road, High Beach for amenity purposes SEF 26/20	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Consultation
Report author: Martin Newnham, Head Forest Keeper	

Summary

This report is necessary to address the continuing Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) at the Queens Green/Pillow Mound car parks either side of Manor Road, High Beach. The easing of the COVID-19 'lockdown' guidance has seen an increase of ASB particularly focused on the High Beach car parks with Spontaneous Social Gatherings continuing into the night and well into the early morning. The SSGs are associated with the broadcast of loud music from vehicles, the lighting of barrage fireworks, large scale littering, drug taking and the consumption of legal highs. In addition to a change.org petition with 7,150 signatures (28.09.20) seeking combined action to reduce ASB, some local residents at High Beach and at Wellington Hill have complained about the continuing ASB and have formed a campaign group entitled 'Make High Beach Safe'.

Overtime working by Forest Keepers and Enforcement Officers has supported the enforcement of the night-time parking byelaw at High Beach which has reduced, but not eliminated, the problem and requires a continued long-term staffing presence, backed by Police support at High Beach which represents just 3 of Epping Forest's 55 car parks which is unsustainable. Working with Essex Police, District and County Councils options to redesign and gate the car parks, increase ANPR video surveillance of the area or enforce a night-time closure of Manor Road have been considered. The night-time closure of Manor Road is considered to be the most effective solution to controlling ASB at the site and is recommended to your Committee as a proposal for public consultation by the traffic authority. The District Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner have agreed to fund the £12,700 infrastructure needed to deliver a Traffic Regulation Order at the site in return for the City Corporation's operation of the daily opening and closure of the gates.

Recommendation(s)

Consultative members are asked to consider

- Supporting commencement of public consultation by the traffic authority on options for addressing the Anti-Social Behaviour issues at Queens Green and Pillow Mounds car parks described in the report, including the night-time closure of Manor Road, between the junctions with Wellington Hill and Paul's Nursery Road, to reduce levels of Anti-Social Behaviour.

- Should public consultation support the scheme delegate authority to the Town Clerk, Chairman and Deputy Chairman to implement the scheme and enter into a formal agreement with Essex County Council as the traffic authority for the daily opening and closing of the road control gating.

Main Report

Background

1. High Beach has a long-standing reputation as a popular Forest destination for Londoners. Both the Queens Green and Pillow Mounds open space provide a natural open break to near continuous woodland cover across much of the north of the Forest. In addition, the pubs at Kings Oak Hotel at the top of High Beach and the Duke of Wellington (now closed) at the bottom of Wellington Hill have traditionally provided 'bookends' to an attractive short walk. In effect, High Beach has all the key attributes of a popular visit namely with local walks, pubs, tea huts, ice cream van, visitor centre, public toilets and an expansive view towards Galley Hill and the Lee Valley.
2. Latterly, the rebranding of the Kings Oak Hotel as part of 'The Only Way Is Essex' or TOWIE-related scene has added an additional cachet to any visit, particularly for millennials. High Beach is also widely recognised as a meeting place that services a Public Sex Environment (PSE) advertised on the Internet at nearby Fairmead Road which is being addressed separately through an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO).
3. As a component of the High Beach's general popularity, ASB issues have been a long running issue. The City Corporation worked previously with EFDC, as the then Highway Authority, to close Queens Grove - the road running between Pauls Nursery and Manor Roads - to deter circling parades by motor cyclists. Since 2005, the City Corporation and Essex County Council have worked to manage problems with excessive traffic speed and parade-related traffic offences on Manor Road.
4. In 2012, with funding from the City Corporation, Heritage Lottery Fund and Essex County Council, helped realise some High Beach Master Plan objectives agreed with the local community. Manor Road was 'cranked' and provided with speed tables through a land exchange between the Highway and Forest to reduce traffic speed, with the large gravel car park hard standing, - the centre of deceleration spinning by vehicles (known as dough-nutting), - modified to provide 90 degree parking bays.
5. The remodelled road layout and parking scheme has proved popular with day visitors and has had an overall positive impact on daytime traffic speeds, with the bollards, road 'cranking', chicane and speed tables requiring many vehicles to slow down to safely navigate the route. However, improvement to has seen the site continue to grow in popularity for night-time and early morning visitors. The site is associated with broadcast music from car sounds systems; the parading of sports vehicles with upgraded engines and nitrous oxide systems, the heavy

consumption of alcohol, nitrous oxide and 'skunk' marijuana and the obstruction of local traffic by pedestrian congregations on the Highway. Local reports of concern from the local community have increased from 2016 onwards and in 2017, litter picking support for the site was increased to address daily accumulation of litter on site, especially broken glass and nitrous oxide canisters.

6. Many night-time and early morning users are attracted to the site as a destination that contrasts strongly with urban London. Anecdotal discussions suggest that in addition to the attraction of the Forest, many users experience feelings of safety at High Beach allowing them to escape what they consider to be disapproval from older members of their community and enforcement services, however, many are unaware of their impacts around noise and littering on the local community.
7. Between November 2017 to February 2020, Epping Forest Keepers worked jointly with the Essex Police Community policing team carrying out joint patrols. These were carried out across the north of the Forest at least one weekend per month and during the week dependant on police resources to address ASB and crime at night within the forest. In addition Multi agency (which included Police LA officers EA, VOSA and HMRC) joint operations took place every two months focusing on environmental crime, fly tipping ASB, excise matters and road safety. Both operations were designed to detect, disrupt and deter inappropriate behaviour and crime within the Forest. While the joint patrols were extremely valuable to addressing individual crimes and provided a wider deterrent effect, they did not impact on overall levels of poor behaviour at High Beach.
8. During the national COVID-19 'lockdown', Essex County Council closed its Country Parks, the National Trust closed Hatfield Forest and some Boroughs closed London parks. Epping Forest as London's largest unenclosed open space remained open throughout 'lockdown' to provide much needed recreation facilities. Visitors travelling by car increased to such an extent that car parks were full by 10am and surrounding roads became heavily congested. By Easter weekend car parks were reluctantly and temporarily closed for 6 weeks to deter those travelling to the Forest by car.
9. As the weather grew warmer and lockdown measures relaxed, Forest 'honeypot' sites experienced huge crowds gathering to picnic with several instances of drunken and anti-social behaviour. In addition a number of illegal raves have taken place. All this has combined to create unprecedented amounts of litter with as many staff as possible redeployed to litter pick alongside many local volunteers.
10. The night-time use of High Beach car parks is contrary to section 3(11)(c) of the Epping Forest Byelaws (1980) which prohibits overnight parking between one hour after sunset and one hour before sunrise.

Current Position

11. On average visitor numbers to Epping Forest since lockdown have increased by 350% with some individual sites like High Beach experiencing an additional 525%

increase in visitors. The activities at the site have resulted in a 7,150 (28.09.20) strong change.org petition demanding more coordinated action is done to manage ASB in the village. Some members of the local community also launched a 'Make High Beach Safe' campaign in June 2020 to press for a reduction in noise, traffic offences and intimidating behaviour.

12. Since July Forest Keepers and Enforcement Officers have undertaken overtime late shifts alongside Head Forest Keeper, Callout Duty Managers and the Superintendent, with the full support of Essex Police, to enforce night-time byelaw parking bans. These activities require an onsite presence 1 hour before sunset through to midnight to enforce closure and are not sustainable in the long-term.

Options

13. Your Committee has four Options to address the impact of increasing Anti-Social behaviour on the management of the site: on disturbance to residents and City of London staff and Essex Police time:

- i. The extension of power and telecommunications infrastructure to the Manor Road area and the installation of pole-mounted Automatic number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras to facilitate enforcement by the City Corporation of Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) to owners of vehicles breaking night-time byelaws and action by Essex Police to target drivers committing Road Traffic Offences. This approach would ensure the least modification to the existing landscape and would not require Forest Keepers to formally approach users to close the site. The scheme would require a substantial investment and of £94,600 to enable the scheme and may not directly stop the incidents occurring. A Data Protection Impact Assessment would be needed to be carried out and considered before installation of surveillance equipment.

This option is not recommended.

- ii. The deepening and remodelling of the 90-degree roadside bay parking bays to enable the installation of gates to facilitate the closure of car parks to close at night. This approach would require the extension of car parking into the Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation. Natural England would be unlikely to provide consent for these works without the provision of substantial and expensive mitigation activity. If consent was possible, the cost of deepening and gating the car parks is estimated to cost £360,000. Such a proposal would require capital funding which does not currently meet City Corporation capital funding criteria. **This option is not recommended.**

- iii. Using a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to gate and close a 200-metre section of Manor Road coinciding with 96 car parking bays at night. Night-time site closure could be achieved by installing through a TRO highway compliant gates and signs at the:

- SW approach to Queens Green opposite the TRO-regulated Queens Grove and Wellington Hill allowing vehicles to bypass the closed section via Wellington Hill and Pynest Green Lane
 - NE approach to Queens Green opposite Pauls Nursery Road junction
Additional road signing may be required to warn of the revised road structure/night-time closure. The £12,700 scheme would be implemented and funded by ECC and EFDC with CoL providing long-term assistance with the responsibility for gate opening and closing. A direct benefit is seen as the release of Essex Police and Forest Keeper time in 'policing' this location. **This option is recommended.**
- iv. Leave the current car park scheme in place reducing night-time enforcement activity to periodic joint operations as Police resources allow. **This option is not recommended.**

Proposals

14. While this is formally a Highways Scheme which only the traffic authority (not the Conservators) have power to promote, it is being implemented for amenity purposes, including partly to manage Forest facilities. The traffic authority will therefore resolve to pursue the proposal, and public and other stakeholder consultation will be required as part of the formal TRO process.
15. To prevent the displacement of offending vehicles to other immediate parts of the High Beach area, additional works to secure car parking north of the Manor Road/Paul's Nursery Road junction and at Rushey Plain turnaround car park were also identified. These planned works will be brought forward to support the scheme and will be met by Epping Forest local risk budgets. The Pillow Mounds and Queen's Green car parks offer wide ranging views, convenient and commodious destination parking, the risks of displacing this activity to elsewhere in the Forest is not considered a major risk.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

16. The recommendations of this report support the Corporate Plan with particular reference to the following aims:
- a. Contribute to a flourishing society**
 - i. People enjoy good health and wellbeing
 - b. Shape Outstanding Environments**
 - iii. Our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained, where we
 - a. Maintain our buildings, streets and public spaces to high standards.
 - b. Build resilience to natural and man-made threats by strengthening, protecting and adapting our infrastructure, directly and by influencing others.
17. The report supports the Open Spaces Business Plan as follows:
- a. Open Spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible.**
 - i. Our open spaces, heritage and cultural assets are protected, conserved and enhanced

- ii. London has clean air and mitigates flood risk and climate change

Implications

18. **Financial:** The District Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner have agreed to fund both the TRO costs and the £12,700 (which includes the TRO costs) infrastructure needed to deliver the TRO scheme at the site in return for the City Corporation's operation of the daily opening and closure of the gates. City Corporation staff already open and close car parks gates across the Forest and these two additional gates could be added to existing Forest Keeper duties. Such an arrangement would need to be a formal agreement with the traffic authority.
19. **Legal:** Under the Epping Forest Byelaws section 3 (11) it is an offence to park in a vehicle park between one hour before sunrise and one hour after sunset for picnic or other pleasure purposes
20. **Equality:** The area subject to proposed gating controls has 4 disabled parking bays. As all the parking on site is being subjected to controls only when parking would be illegal a review of the scheme does not indicate that any protected characteristics would be unfairly restricted.
21. **Charity:** 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.

Conclusion

22. The gating of a public highway to control ASB is a significant step and will undoubtedly add to the journey length for road users travelling during closure hours who will be obliged to detour around local roads. Essex Police, together with the District and County Councils, support this approach in principle, in order to effectively manage ASB that has created difficulties at High Beach for some years, but has been magnified during the COVID-19 public health emergency. However, any final decision will be subject to consultation responses which must be considered, and the outcome of the consultation cannot be prejudged.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – MAP

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