

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Epping Forest Consultative – For consultation	10 02 2021
Epping Forest and Commons – For decision	08 03 2021
<b>Subject:</b> High Beach Individual Site Plan (SEF 08/21b)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<b>1, 2, 11, 12</b>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces	<b>For decision</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Geoff Sinclair, Head of Operations, Epping Forest	

### **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 the High Beach area. The legal and statutory context and significant management considerations described in the ISP have been outlined, along with the management strategy proposed for the area.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Epping Forest and Commons Committee Members are asked to:

- i. Approve option 1 of the report.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. On the 18 November 2019, your Committee approved the Epping Forest Management Strategy for the period of 2020-29. As part of the strategy, existing operational activity in main geographical locations and for key activities is being reviewed.
2. The review process comprises a reappraisal of the Epping Forest Charitable Trust's 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 the High Beach area that has been prepared as part of the review.

### **Current Position**

4. High Beach is an extensive area of ancient wood pasture occupying a high ridge between the valleys of the Lea and Roding and forms the traditional heart of the northern half of Epping Forest. The High Beach area has an especially high conservation value for the internationally important habitats and species present, and the abundance of ancient beech pollards in the locality; these are reflected in the area being part of the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a statutory designation of international conservation importance.
5. High Beach has a long history as the 'Epping Forest' destination. As a result, this distinctive brand attracts a large number of visitors of all types, especially at weekends and on Bank Holidays. The area is, however, relatively remote from the public transport network and the parking availability is frequently insufficient to cope with the demand, with substantial local traffic problems at peak times.
6. In addition to significant and continuing unplanned 'windfall' planning consents within, and adjacent to, the village envelope, substantial housing growth is planned in the surrounding districts under a number of Local Plans, with consequent predicted additional visitor pressure to already popular areas such as High Beach. As part of the development of these Local Plans, a SAC Mitigation Strategy is being developed, by Epping Forest District Council and the London Boroughs of Waltham Forest, Redbridge and Newham to mitigate the anticipated effects of new housing developments on Epping Forest.
7. The High Beach ISP seeks to define the management and mitigation that will be required to address future threats to the special nature of High Beach and presents a strategic work program to ensure a sustainable future for the conservation and heritage interest of High Beach, along with its immense recreational value.

### **Proposals**

8. The ISP first outlines the legal and statutory context at High Beach, 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 the legal and statutory context, the ISP identifies a 10-year management strategy for High Beach, summarised as follows:
  - a. To implement a programme of conservation measures that will contribute towards improving the conservation status of the Epping Forest SAC and the favourable condition of the SSSI compartments around High Beach.
  - b. To ensure that COL offers a visitor experience to High Beach in a sustainable and welcoming way.
  - c. To finance an Infrastructure Improvement Programme for High Beach, partly derived from income generated locally.
  - d. To encourage local community involvement in the management and enhancement of the Forest at High Beach.
  - e. To seek the mitigation of the impact of additional visits from new developments within Epping Forest SAC's Zone of Influence.

### Management Considerations

10. There are a wide range of management considerations given in the report and these have been summarised below:
  - a. Ecological: The High Beach area is of outstanding conservation value with the pollarded wood pasture landscape thought to date back to at least Anglo-Saxon times (410 – 1066 AD). Pollard management went into decline in the 19th Century and despite more recent conservation measures, the condition of the population of ancient Beech trees is a concern. The area also supports key habitats including:
    - i. Acid Grassland and wet and dry Heathland: UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitats, habitats for which the Forest is partly notified under the SSSI and the heathlands are SAC habitats. As such, they are a top priority for wildlife conservation nationally.
    - ii. Bogs: There are several bogs through the area supporting notable wetland species. All the bogs have declined through encroachment by trees and visitor pressure on this sensitive habitat with notable species losses such as the last colony in Essex of Marsh St John's Wort.
    - iii. Spring lines and streams: There are several spring lines around High Beach that feed into the River Lea or the Roding catchment. These streams provide valuable habitat for plant and aquatic invertebrate species of conservation interest but typically over-shaded and trees have invaded their margins.
    - iv. Open Water: Permanent and seasonal ponds are to be found throughout the area with some of high ecological interest,

especially for dragonfly species and amphibian species, including Common Toad and Great Crested Newts. Scrub and tree encroachment and invasive non-native species, including the very aggressive New Zealand Pygmy are concerns.

- b. Heritage and landscape: The High Beach area has a rich heritage with a number of features of historical interest, dating from the Mesolithic period through to modern times, as well as exposed geology of local interest. The historical features combine to create a distinctive High Beach 'brand', such that visitors to High Beach come from much further afield compared to other locations within Epping Forest. The presence of Queen's Green and the 'Kings Oak' have provided a focus for large numbers of visitors since Victorian times, especially in the summer months, and on bank holidays. Conversely, high visitor numbers at High Beach are an increasing concern, with negative impacts on heritage features.
- c. Access: The area is relative remote from public transport and it is thought that higher than the average of 77% of visitors arriving by car is the situation at High Beach. There is still a significant issue with constrained car parking capacity associated with statutory conservation designations, especially on weekends and bank holidays. A temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) was introduced on 22 May 2020 on the roads around High Beach to address long-standing on-road parking issues by Essex County Council. As part of the overarching Sustainable Visitor Strategy, the connectivity for non-car users between existing public transport connections and High Beach will be assessed, alongside the increase in cut-through driving and the extensive overriding on narrow rural roads and associated verges.
- d. Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB): High Beach is substantially impacted by anti-social behaviour problems.
  - i. Noise: Local residents are subjected to considerable late evening and early morning disruption from ASB at High Beach and Hangman's Hill, through traffic offences; large public congregations; loud broadcast music and exhibition firework ignitions
  - ii. Fly-tipping: In the period 6 June 2019 – 5 June 2020, almost 21% of fly-tips in Epping Forest occurred in the High Beach area (the figure was 16.5% for the previous year).
  - iii. Littering: A large amount of litter is collected from Queen's Green and the Pillow Mounds, especially at the end of busy summer days and following unlicensed spontaneous social events.
  - iv. Drug use: Drug-taking of all classes of drugs is frequent around High Beach, in particular Nitrous Oxide (NOx, laughing gas) cannisters, marijuana and alcohol.
  - v. Public sex environment: Pillow Mounds car park and the Rushey Plain Turnaround are noted public sex environments (PSE). The impacts of the PSE are managed by COL and the Essex Police Service (EPS) to NPCC (formerly ACPO) guidance.

- e. Local Plans: The Local Plans for both Epping Forest District Council (EDFC) and the adjacent Local Authorities are being revised and all are planning a significant increase in housing and employment space. High Beach is very well-known location, with growing negative impacts on the features of conservation interest of the Epping Forest SAC. The developments arising out of the new Local Plans are likely to add further negative impacts to the High Beach area.

#### 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 High Beach have been identified as:
  - a. Fire Risk: High Beach has a history of regular unauthorised barbecues and fires by the public.
  - b. Statutory Designations: The whole area lies within the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Three of the five compartments were assessed by Natural England (NE) as 'unfavourable – recovering', one compartment as 'unfavourable-no change' and one as 'Favourable'. The area also lies within Epping Forest District Council's 'Green Belt and District Open Land'.
  - c. Invasive / Alien Species: There is a heavy infestation of New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) in Speakman's Pond. Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) is increasingly prevalent on the many open grown oaks across the site and poses a risk to human health. Other INNS of concern in the area include Himalayan Balsam, Rhododendron and Japanese Knotweed.
  - d. Utilities: Thames Water have an underground reservoir adjacent to the Pillow Mounds, not on Epping Forest land. There has been a regular history of prolonged leaks from this facility running in to Speakmans Pond, which was fixed in autumn 2019.
  - e. Properties: There are several significant City Corporation properties in High Beach:
    - i. the High Beach Visitor Centre which is managed by volunteers from the Epping Forest Heritage Trust,
    - ii. the Field Centre (1970) leased to the Field Studies Council
    - iii. the Kings Oak Hotel (1887), owned by City Corporation Investments and leased and operated as a gastro pub and entertainment venue.
    - iv. Public Toilets managed by the Charitable Trust in partnership with Epping Forest District Council
    - v. two heritage structures – The Garden House and thatched horse trough.
    - vi. three staff lodges located in the village.

The Charitable Trust also licences the operation of two tea huts in High Beach at Hill Wood (1928) and the Pillow Mounds.

### Outline Management Program

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.

### **Options**

14. Your Committee are asked to consider two options:
15. **Option 1:** It is proposed that High Beach ISP be adopted as the operational plan for the High Beach area.
16. The plan translates the Epping Forest Management strategy into practical management options for the High Beach area and forms part of the developing business plan for the Epping Forest. **This option is recommended.**
17. **Option 2:** Do not approve the High Beach ISP.
18. This would result in the continuation of the largely reactive management process and reduce our ability to address significant property and management considerations impacting on the High Beach area. **This option is not recommended**

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

#### Epping Forest Consultative Committee Comments

There was debate around the need to involve the Parish Councils and High Beach Church more in the Charitable Trust's strategic planning in the High Beach area. The presence of good community liaison mechanisms, such as the Parish newsletter, were highlighted. The relative remoteness of High Beach and the poor public transport network was also raised as an important factor needing consideration. The need to conserve the presence of Great Crested Newts in several ponds was also highlighted, alongside the need for a greater focus on developing a strategic path network through the area.

#### Strategic implications

19. 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 and PDNs form part of the operational planning to achieve this aim of the Corporate Plan.

20. Open Spaces Department Business Plan 2020-21: The proposals in the ISP contribute towards meeting the following outcomes of the plan: 1,3,4,5,7,8,9 and 11.
21. Mitigating the impact on the Epping Forest SAC of increased development arising from Local Authority Plans is currently under review. As one of the busiest and most environmentally sensitive locations in Epping Forest the outcome of this review has important implications for the High Beach area

#### Financial implications

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

#### Legal implications

24. 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.
25. The High Beach ISP provides the information and guidance to help the COL to meet its requirements under the above Acts.

#### Charity Implications

26. 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.

#### Risk implications

27. None

#### Equalities implications

28. No negative equality impacts were identified for this proposal.

#### Climate implications

29. None.

#### Security implications

30. None.

### **Conclusion**

31. An Individual Site Plan (ISP) has been prepared for High Beach. 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.

32. 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 – High Beach Individual Site Plan
- Appendix 2 – Figures:
  - Figure 1a: Locations of named features in the High Beach area
  - Figure 1b: Locations of named features in the centre of High Beach
  - Figure 2: High Beach Summary Management Proposals

### **Report author**

#### **Geoff Sinclair**

Head of Operations, Epping Forest, Open Spaces Department

T : 020 8532 5301 E: [geoff.sinclair@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:geoff.sinclair@cityoflondon.gov.uk)