

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest Consultative – For consultation	16/06/2021
Epping Forest and Commons – For decision	12/07/2021
Subject: Chingford Individual Site Plan (SEF 26/21b)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 11, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
Report of: Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
Report author: Geoff Sinclair, Head of Operations, Epping Forest and Fiona Martin, Management Planning Assistant	

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 Chingford 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. Note the comments from the Epping Forest Consultative Committee
- ii. Adopt Option1 where it is proposed that the Chingford ISP be adopted as the operational plan for the Chingford Area.

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 Chingford area that has been prepared as part of the review.

Current Position

4. The Chingford area encompasses an extensive tract of varied terrestrial and aquatic habitats, occupying a wide, gently sloping plain to the south of High Beach, between the valleys of the rivers Lea and Ching. Parts of the Chingford area, such as Barn Hoppitt, have an especially high conservation value for the scarce habitats and species present, and the abundance of ancient Oak pollards; much of the Chingford area is included in the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a statutory designation of international importance.
5. Connaught Water, Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge and Chingford Golf Course are of important amenity value, attracting a wide spectrum of visitors from beyond the immediate locality. The Visitor Centre at Chingford and Butler's Retreat café, both adjacent to Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge, and the Holly Trail café next to Bury Road car park are popular with visitors. Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge, a unique Tudor building of national historic importance, is the stand-out heritage feature of the Chingford area, but a number of other buildings and monuments are of historic importance, as is Chingford Golf Course, established in 1888.
6. Substantial housing growth is planned in the surrounding districts under a number of Local Plans, with consequent predicted additional visitor pressure. As part of the development of these Local Plans, a SAC Mitigation Strategy is being developed, which will have significant influence on the Chingford area. The 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. This Individual Site Plan details programmes of work, many of which are building on long-established plans and strategies, lists current management considerations and site-specific issues that the wider mitigation strategy will need to address, and vice versa. The ISP will need to be revised regularly to reflect changes to other plans, including the forthcoming SAC Mitigation Strategy.

Proposals

8. The ISP first outlines the legal and statutory context for the Chingford area, 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 the Chingford area, summarised as follows:
 - a. To identify a programme of conservation measures that builds on existing management and further contributes towards improving the condition status of the Epping Forest SAC and SSSI in the Chingford area.
 - b. To ensure that COL offers a visitor experience to the Chingford area that meets the needs of the surrounding communities today and into the future, in a sustainable and welcoming way.
 - c. To finance an Infrastructure Improvement Programme for the Chingford area, partly derived from income generated locally.
 - d. To seek to mitigate the impact of additional visits from new developments within Epping Forest SAC's Zone of Influence, through a range of measures including improved landscaping, alternative routes and destinations, alongside more and improved interpretation and orientation.

Management Considerations

10. There are a wide range of management considerations given in the report and these have been summarised below:
 - a. Ecological: The Chingford area is of outstanding conservation value and includes most of the high nature conservation value habitats of Epping Forest, including ancient semi-natural woodland, scrub, acid grassland, heathland, marsh and open water. An ancient oak population of over 350 trees makes Barn Hoppitt of national importance in its own right. Key habitats and species in this area are detailed in the ISP and include:
 - 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. The acid grassland is being adversely impacted by the historic decline in grazing, increasing visitor impacts and air pollution.
 - ii. *Wood pasture and ancient/keystone pollards*: Barn Hoppitt is unique in Epping Forest, being the best example of Oak wood pasture in Epping Forest, whilst a significant proportion of Bury Wood comprises ancient Hornbeam pollards. Bury Wood and Barn Hoppitt have been the focus for veteran tree and wood

pasture management for over 30 years, with some coupes in Bury Wood on their third repollarding since initial working. The fungi and invertebrate assemblage are of international significance, with numerous nationally scarce species. There are significant pressures impacting on this nationally important habitat, outlined in the report.

- iii. *Lowland calcareous grassland*: Yardley Hill is the only location in Epping Forest with lowland calcareous grassland. It is being adversely impacted by scrub and secondary woodland invasion over many decades. If the calcareous species associated with this outcrop of chalky boulder clay are lost, these calcareous species would also be lost to Epping Forest as a whole.
 - iv. *Neutral grassland*: Much of Chingford Plain is tussocky neutral grassland with patches of scrub cover, providing excellent habitat for many birds. The historic decline in quality of the neutral grassland on Chingford Plain is being addressed by a reinstated grazing regime, however there is still a significant issue with trampling/compaction of grassland by visitors in the wetter months.
 - v. *Spring lines, rivers/streams and ditches*: The River Ching issues from Connaught Water where it is met by the Cuckoo Brook. Several ditches drain water from the hills to the north of Connaught Water and at times have given rise to flooding problems. Overall, these watercourses provide valuable habitat for plant and aquatic invertebrate species of conservation interest but are typically over-shaded and trees have invaded their margins.
 - vi. *Open Water*: Connaught Water is the largest water body in the Chingford area, with several permanent and ephemeral ponds also through the area. Connaught Water is incredibly important for the local bat population with significant numbers of up to ten species foraging over the lake. The invasive non-native species New Zealand Pygmy is a concern in some ponds.
 - vii. *Fungi*: The fungi of the area are diverse, with many uncommon species, including the rare Oak Polypore, for which Epping Forest is a UK stronghold, and the Zoned Rosette, both species legally-protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
 - viii. *Invertebrates*: Extensive survey of Barn Hoppitt between 1995 and 2010 confirmed that the area is of international significance for its saproxylic fauna (invertebrates that are dependent on dead or decaying wood); these invertebrates are associated with the ancient oak wood pasture habitat.
- b. *Heritage and landscape*: The Chingford area has a rich and varied history, though the prominence of QEHL may have eclipsed other aspects of the heritage of the local area. The QEHL is a Grade II* listed Tudor 'hunt standing' built in 1543 for Henry VIII. Ownership of the building passed to COL as part of the Epping Forest Act 1878 which

specified that it be 'preserved and maintained by them (the Conservators) as an object of public and antiquarian interest'. The Chingford area has also long been a prominent visitor location and during Victorian times, Jubilee Retreat and Butler's Retreat on Chingford Plain provided entertainment such as helter-skelters, merry-go-rounds, donkey rides and non-alcoholic refreshments from tea rooms that could seat up to 3000 people. The view from Pole Hill is one of the most dramatic in Epping Forest and it is also a location with its own rich history, including a connection with TE Lawrence and being associated with the establishment of the Greenwich Meridian.

- c. *Access:* The area is well connected to public transport, with Chingford Station 5 minutes' walk away and where a number of bus routes also terminate. The area hosts seven car parks; however, there are significant issues at busy times of on-road car parking, eg by Connaught Water, leading to congestion and road safety concerns. The forthcoming overarching Sustainable Visitor Strategy will aim to address the issues concerning visitor access to the popular locations of QEHL, Connaught Water, the Visitor Centre and Butler's Retreat.
- d. *Chingford Golf Course:* This is an 18-hole public golf course run by Epping Forest Charitable Trust as part of Epping Forest; there is a small shop in the Caddy House building opposite the golf course, adjacent to the Holly Trail café. The course was established in 1888 and later redesigned by William Dunn (Jnr), the first course professional, and then James Braid in the 1920s. It is currently laid out in two returning loops, and plays a maximum 6342 yards, par 72. The course hosts two golf clubs - Royal Epping Forest Golf Club and Chingford Golf Club.
- e. *Local Plans:* The Local Plans for both Epping Forest District Council (EDFC) and the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) are being revised and all are planning a significant increase in housing and employment space. Chingford is a very well-known and popular location amongst visitors 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 Chingford 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 Chingford have been identified as:
- a. *Statutory Designations:* Much of the area lies within the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Four of the seven compartments were assessed by Natural England (NE) as 'unfavourable – recovering', one compartment as 'unfavourable-no change' and two as 'Favourable'. Notwithstanding the unit condition assessment outcomes, Natural England states that there remains a very significant issue relating to air quality and many veteran trees within the area display clear symptoms of stress. The area also lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt with QEHL

and the area around QEHL designated as Archaeological Priority Areas. QEHL is a Grade II* Listed Building, whilst Butler's Retreat and the Ordnance Survey granite obelisk on Pole Hill are Grade II Listed Buildings.

- b. *Flood Risk*: Under the Reservoirs Act 1975 as amended 2010, Connaught Water is classified as a Large Raised Reservoir. Connaught Water also floods at the upstream end of the lake each winter, which in turn floods the Easy Access Path, impeding access. Winter flooding also occurs along the Red Path from the main ditch draining into Connaught Water, which drains the hills to the north.
- c. *Invasive / Alien Species*: New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) is present in Butlers Retreat Pond, Warren Pond and the Golf Course Pond. Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) is increasingly prevalent on open grown oaks across the site and poses a risk to human health. Other INNS of concern in the area include Canada Goose, Ash Dieback, Cherry Laurel and Terrapin.
- d. *Utilities*: An easement was granted to South Essex Waterworks Company (now Thames Water) to lay a water main pipeline across Epping Forest land in the Chingford area. An analysis of 2019 aerial photography along the pipeline route shows that, in several locations along the pipeline, the vegetation needs further work to maintain the area as grassland.
- e. *Properties*: There are several significant City Corporation properties in the Chingford area, including three Heritage Listed Buildings/Structures. These are detailed in Appendix 3 of the report. The Charitable Trust also licences the operation of two Cafés and a cycle hire facility in the Chingford area. The Orion Harriers running club headquarters rent part of Jubilee Retreat from COL.

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 the Chingford ISP be adopted as the operational plan for the Chingford area.
16. The plan translates the Epping Forest Management strategy into practical management options for the Chingford area and forms part of the

developing business plan for the Epping Forest. **This option is recommended.**

17. **Option 2:** Do not approve the Chingford 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 Chingford area. **This option is not recommended**

Corporate & Strategic Implications

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 Chingford area.

Financial implications

22. The outline management program has been framed to fit within existing levels of local risk spend at Chingford.

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 Chingford 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.

Epping Forest Consultative Committee

31. Members of the Epping Forest Consultative raise the following issues:

- a. The Royal Epping Forest Golf Club pointed out that the Club had made a pre-application for a much smaller development in order to fund a new clubhouse and secure the finances of the club for the next 100 years, but that the local Borough Council had put a much larger proposal into the emerging Local Plan. The text in the ISP has been left unchanged as this refers to what has been said in the Local plan.
- b. Lee Valley Youth Cycling Club (LVCC) expressed the view that the impact of cyclists on the Forest should not be considered under the anti-social behaviour section of the report. The report section has been retitled to 'Visitor Management'.
- c. LVCC also requested more information on the nature and location of areas sensitive to cycling use so this can be disseminated to cyclists. It was also raised that better onsite signage might also be helpful to educate cyclists.
- d. Epping Forest Heritage Trust (EFHT) noted that we propose to remove the small car park at the front of the Visitor Centre, but made the point that this will need some thought to continue to accommodate deliveries to the VC and also EFHT staff picking up stock from the VC to take to the VC at High Beach. They were also keen on a review of the brown tourist signs.

Conclusion

32. An Individual Site Plan (ISP) has been prepared for the Chingford area. 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.

33. 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 – Chingford Individual Site Plan
- Appendix 2 – Figure 1a: Chingford Area Locations – Northwest
Figure 1b: Chingford Area Locations – Southeast
Figure 1c: Chingford Area Locations – Northeast
Figure 1d: Chingford Area Locations - QEHL

Report authors

Geoff Sinclair Head of Operations, Epping Forest, Open Spaces Department

T : 020 8532 5301 E: geoff.sinclair@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Fiona Martin, Management Plan Assistant, Epping Forest, Open Spaces Department, E : Fiona.Martin@cityoflondon.gov.uk