

Committee(s) Epping Forest and Commons	Dated 17/01/2022
Subject: Wanstead Park: Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space Project (SEF 04/22)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2/3/4/11/12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	y
If so, how much?	£100,000
What is the source of Funding?	100% Grant aid
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	No
Report of: Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director Environment	For Decision
Report authors: Geoff Sinclair, Head of Operations Jeremy Dagley, Head of Conservation	

Summary

This report is necessary to consider a proposal by the London Borough of Redbridge to nominate Wanstead Park as part of a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) 'toolbox' or 'SANGS infrastructure' response to mitigating the London Borough of Redbridge's Local Plan development impact on the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The proposal would provide a one-off payment of up to £100,000, collected by the Local Planning Authority from developer-funded contributions. This funding would be used to improve visitor infrastructure on a part of the Forest outside the SAC, allowing it to accommodate predicted increases in recreational pressure and, thereby, provide an alternative destination for visitors to ease recreational pressure on the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and SAC.

The funding opportunity arising through this SANGS infrastructure funding would allow three projects identified in the Wanstead Parkland Plan to be progressed, namely, a new surfaced path through Reservoir wood, improved access from the southwest of the park from the 'Exchange Lands' linking with the Roding Valley Way and a contribution towards the development of a natural play area in the park.

Recommendation(s)

Epping Forest and Commons Committee Members are asked to:

- approve the acceptance of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) infrastructure funding of up to £100,000 from the London Borough of Redbridge, using developer-funded contributions, to progress visitor access improvements in Wanstead Park and its exchange lands.
- authorise the completion of any necessary suitable legal agreement with the London Borough of Redbridge for the transfer of monies and delivery of infrastructure to ensure SAC mitigation, the final terms to be delegated

to the Superintendent of Epping Forest in consultation with the City Solicitor and Chamberlain.

Main Report

Background

1. At your meeting of the 18 November 2019 the Wanstead Park: Parkland Plan was adopted to guide the future management of the Wanstead Park, Registered Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest.
2. The Parkland Plan sets out plans for the future Grade II* heritage landscape shared across four land ownerships, including the majority held in trust by the City of London Corporation. The Plan guides the existing spending on the park by the Epping Forest Charitable Trust together with an aspirational programme of works that could only be progressed subject to additional financing being identified. Working with local partners and agencies resourcing options are being actively explored to help take the Parkland Plan actions forward., Examples include the Wanstead Wetland Project approved by your Committee of March 2021 and the Playground Project which is also before your Committee for approval...
3. The London Borough of Redbridge (LBR) and the other local authorities within the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Zone of Influence have been developing their Local Plan policies with regard to accommodating locally determined housing targets in their boroughs. Natural England (NE) has advised that a recreational Zone of Influence (Zoi) of 6.2Km should be used to determine whether new residential applications will have a significant recreational impact on Epping Forest SAC.
4. To offset harmful impacts of new residential developments, an Epping Forest SAC Mitigation Strategy is being developed by the Epping Forest Charity, Local Authorities and NE. This Mitigation Strategy includes mitigation management within the Forest itself, so-called Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures, and the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs) recreation sites separate from the SAC/SSSI. The SAMM measures are reported to your Committee separately.
5. In the London Boroughs generally the physical space for new SANGs is either highly constrained or the areas where provision may be possible do not match the proposed residential development locations. As a result, Natural England has advised that local authorities, acting as 'competent authorities' required to protect the SAC from recreational pressure, should consider not only providing complete SANGs sites but also consider funding a series of smaller so-called 'SANGs infrastructure' interventions to enhance existing green spaces.
6. Natural England also describes this smaller-scale infrastructure approach to additional mitigation as a 'toolbox approach'. Such SANGs infrastructure interventions would need to ensure the protection of those green spaces where the interventions are proposed, while also accommodating a measurable uplift in visitor numbers to provide diversionary recreational attractions that deflect further pressure from the SAC.

7. In LBR, the options for SANGs are being identified in a forthcoming Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy, for which Natural England has been providing some guidance to the Local Authority on SANGs provision. Although LBR does have options for larger public greenspaces, developments in Ilford and eastern areas of LBR, in particular, could give rise to immediate additional pressure on the Forest, and not just on the SAC itself. Given the urban character of this part of LBR, a SANGs infrastructure approach, with a variety of interventions, is being explored by the local authority in relation to developments in this part of the Borough.
8. As a result, LBR has approached the Epping Forest Charity proposing the possibility of using a SANGs toolbox/infrastructure approach to fund a new gateway from the Roding Valley into Wanstead Park. The gateway would improve an existing informal entrance to Wanstead Park from the charity's 'exchange lands' with new signage and interpretation, path upgrade and improvement all the way to Blakehall Road with some support to help develop natural play within the park. (Appendix 1).
9. The proposed projects form part of the Wanstead Parkland Plan and there is potentially £100,000 currently available for financing the works. The works are also considered suitable mitigation measures under LBR's Habitats Regulations Assessment (Appropriate Assessment) for mitigation measures because Wanstead Park and its 'exchange lands' are in an ideal geographical position to provide an alternative recreational destination to the SAC areas. In addition, importantly, such measures would also help to protect the existing important habitats within the Park, including the Bluebells and acid grassland, ahead of the expected increase in visitors.

Options

10. **Option 1:** To support the implementation of a SANGs infrastructure-funded improvement programme at Wanstead Park, as outlined in Appendix One and through legal agreement with LBR. This initiative would provide the opportunity to access finance to progress significant projects identified in the Wanstead Park: Parkland Plan. It also supports the community partnership working to establish a natural play area in the park. In addition, given the increase in nearby residential populations under the LBR Local Plan housing programme, this project seeks to increase the resilience of Wanstead Park infrastructure from increased likely recreational pressure while providing an effective alternative for LBR residents to Epping Forest's SAC areas, thereby mitigating the impact of new residential development. **This option is recommended**
11. **Option 2:** To decline the offer of SANGs infrastructure funding for Wanstead Park as outlined in Appendix One. Declining the offer of funding would require alternative fund-raising approaches to be identified. This may result in significant delays in progressing the infrastructure improvement projects that have been identified in the Wanstead Park Parkland Plan. It may mean that the forecast increases in recreational pressure from the new residential areas near to the Park would not be pre-empted and infrastructure repair and other visitor management costs might increase. It would also restrict options for

reducing visitor pressure on the Epping Forest SAC in the LBR area, where Wanstead Park is well positioned to intercept visitors from new development in Ilford. **This option is not recommended**

Resource Implications

12. The project costs are estimated to be £100,000 (Appendix 1) and would be met through the SANGS infrastructure contribution from the competent authority, LBR. Work on items would only progress when the funding for the items is confirmed and subject to the likelihood of a formal agreement with LBR (see *Legal Implications* below).
13. The SANGS infrastructure payment offer does not include any ongoing maintenance funding. The nature of the improvements proposed are that they are largely robust capital items, such as the construction of a new path, which by design require limited maintenance once installed. The ongoing maintenance costs for this new infrastructure, therefore, are expected to be low but nonetheless will have future funding implications for the Forest's maintenance budget and any eventual replacement(s) cycle. In settling the arrangements with LBR, your officers would seek to secure that an element of the funding is retained for ongoing maintenance but this remains subject to negotiation and would be settled under the delegated authority.

Legal Implications

14. The works are within an Archaeological Priority Area (APA) and will need to be consented by the Local Planning Authority and Historic England.
15. The works are also within the Grade II* Wanstead Park Registered Park and Garden. The proposed works form part of the Parkland Plan which has been developed in consultation with Historic England and are likely to require planning consent.
16. Receipt of the SANGS infrastructure financial award is likely to require a formal legal agreement to be drawn up between the SAC competent authority, London Borough of Redbridge (LBR), and City of London Corporation as Conservators of Epping Forest.

Equalities Implications

17. The works are designed to encourage wider use of the Park through improving its accessibility, visitor orientation and linkage to the wider greenspace network. The natural play area is designed to encourage families with young children to visit and will include play opportunities for 2-10-year-old children of varying abilities. The Aldersbrook area has been identified as an area with a significant play deficit and the nearest public play area is 30-minutes' walk away for most residents.
18. It is considered that there are considerable positive impacts for local children and protected equality groups.

Charity Implications

19. 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.
20. The Charity has clear obligations to protect the Forest under its founding legislation and through subsequent legislation requirements to similarly conserve the SSSI and SAC. While the arrangements will help residential developers to acquire consents, it is in the clear interest of the Charity to work collaboratively with LBR as the competent authority, to minimise the adverse impacts of increased recreational pressure which has effectively been diverted from the SSSI & SAC.

Climate Implications

21. The proposals form part of wider works to reduce or otherwise mitigate the recreational impact on the Epping Forest SAC and, as a consequence, should maintain or even improve its capacity to respond to climate change.
22. The proposals are designed to encourage more local greenspace use and should lead to more people visiting via sustainable transport means such as walking and public transport. Through SAMMS measures future SAC and Visitor Survey monitoring should be able to elucidate the effectiveness of this through targeted questionnaires.

Conclusions

23. Funding for improvements at Wanstead Park has been identified through the SANGs infrastructure (or “toolbox”) approach developed by the LBR as part of its forthcoming Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy to contribute towards offsetting increased recreational impact from new development on the Epping Forest SAC.
24. The proposed funding would be an initial single payment for works and is likely to require a legal agreement to be signed with the LBR. Subsequent SAMMS monitoring will assess the success of the mitigation measures and any requirement for additional maintenance or improvement.
25. It is recommended that SANGs infrastructure funding be accepted (Option 1) for visitor access improvement works at Wanstead Park and its exchange lands, as identified in Appendix 1.

Appendices

Appendix 1: SANGS Infrastructure project proposals for Wanstead Park

Background Papers

- Wanstead Park: Conceptual Options Plan (SEF 38/19). Epping Forest and Commons Committee Report. 18th November 2019

- Wanstead Park: Wetland Improvement Proposals (SEF 09/21b) Epping Forest and Commons Committee Report 8 March 2021
- Wanstead Park Natural Play Area (SEF 03/22) Epping Forest and Commons Committee Report 17 Jan 2022

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