

Committee(s): Epping Forest & Commons Committee	Date(s): 18/07/2024
Subject: The Grotto, Wanstead Park Update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse Engaged Communities • Vibrant Thriving Destination • Flourishing Public Spaces • Providing Excellent Services • Leading Sustainable Environment.
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
If so, how much?	Option A: £355k-£403k (including £296k - £336k for works) Option B: £1.09M-£1.2M (including £910k-£1M for works).
What is the source of Funding?	Not yet known, however discussions with Chamberlains Dept have commenced.
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	No
Report of: Emily Brennan, Natural Environment Director	For Decision
Report author: Rob Shakespeare, Head of Heritage & Museums, Environment Department	

Summary

This report updates Members with actions being taken and planned to remove Wanstead Park Grotto from the Heritage at Risk Register (HARR) and ensure that it has a funded Conservation Management Plan in place, which will protect it for the future.

Repair proposals, having been progressed to date under the Cyclical Works Programme, have resulted in costed options produced by an appointed heritage consultant.

This report summarises the work to date, the current position, the options and confirms that the repair of the Grotto will enter the gateway process as a project from Autumn 2024.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

- Approve the continuation and completion of a Restoration and Maintenance Plan (RMP) for the Grotto, which will identify the specific repairs and maintenance regime that will support its removal from the Heritage at Risk Register, as per Option A in this report. Also, authorise officers to secure listed building consent for the delivery of the repairs identified in the RMP. These activities are fully funded through the Cyclical Works Programme.
- Authorise officers to seek and secure full funding for Option A in coordination with related projects that are also seeking funding across Wanstead Park.
- Advise officers on the further pursuit of Option B, namely the reinstatement of original fabric and restoration of features within the structure and enhancement of the immediate setting of the Grotto.
- Note the repair of the Grotto will enter the gateway process as a project from Autumn 2024 and will be subject to this Committee's scrutiny, as per corporate project procedure.

Main Report

Background

1. The Grotto in Wanstead Park was built in 1762 and, at the time, was a key feature in the grounds of Wanstead House, which survived the demolition of the house itself.
2. In 1882, Wanstead Park was sold to the Corporation of London and opened as a public park. In 1884 the Grotto was severely damaged by a fire, which left only the front façade and a few other sections of the building standing. The remaining ruin retained its special architectural and historic interest, and it was granted Grade II listed status in 1954.
3. Despite *ad hoc* conservation works, surveys and reports from the 1970s to 2000s, the Grotto was placed on the Heritage at Risk Register (HARR) in 2018. A Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was produced in 2019 and approved by EFCC on 16 November 2020, but works were paused due to the onset of the pandemic. The CMP prioritised the creation of a Restoration and Maintenance Plan (RMP), identifying repairs and costs associated with removing the Grotto from the HARR.
4. In 2021, the Heritage of London Trust in partnership with Friends of Wanstead Parklands were successful in securing a grant from the Corporation to

consolidate the Landing Stage (a structure that forms an apron around the base of the Grotto on its lakeside elevation), because of its rapidly deteriorating condition.

5. To date, activities at the Grotto have been led by the Heritage Estate team within City Surveyors as part of the corporate Cyclical Works Programme. From February 2023, officers within the Culture & Projects Section have been acting as client on behalf of Epping Forest charity. At the same time, a project board of relevant Corporation officers and stakeholders was established to provide advice.
6. Key external stakeholders include Historic England, Natural England, London Borough of Redbridge, The Friends of Wanstead Parklands and Heritage of London Trust.
7. As asset owner, Epping Forest charity, has a duty to undertake repairs and establish a maintenance plan for the Grotto to seek its removal from the HARR. Historic England has advised that to be removed from the HARR, the Grotto should be structurally sound, fabric repairs to be completed and a maintenance plan put in place.
8. In 2022 and 2023, preliminary works to the landing stage and the retrieval, documentation and storage of stone from the lakebed were undertaken, along with structural investigations, which revealed the need to stabilise the lean of the main facade.

Current Position

9. Using the results of the surveys and research undertaken, heritage consultants Alan Baxter Associates were appointed in February 2024 to produce a restoration and maintenance plan (RMP) for the Grotto. £85k from the Cyclical Works Programme was allocated to complete the RMP.
10. In March 2024 £150k was allocated through the Cyclical Works Programme towards the repair of the Grotto. In addition, a grant of £14k from HOLT towards works to the Landing Stage remains available. In total, £164k is currently available to undertake the repair and restoration of the Grotto.
11. As part of the production of the RMP, costed repair options were produced and shared with stakeholders, including Historic England to seek their guidance on the extent of repair and restoration works considered necessary to remove the Grotto from the HARR. These options are described below.
12. A Wanstead Park Programme Board was established in June 2024. Its purpose is to review and coordinate programmes, fundraising and communications associated with several interdependent activities within the park, including the repair of the Grotto; reinstatement of the pumping system within the water bodies; the ecological value of the Grotto and; improvements to the historic park landscape linked to a parkland plan. Whilst coordination between these activities

took place on an informal basis, going forward, coordination will take place through the Wanstead Park Programme Board.

13. In April 2024, costed options for the repair and restoration of the Grotto were presented to Historic England, HOLT and Friends of Wanstead Park, together with officers from the City Surveyors Department and Environment Department. Three repair/restoration options were presented, plus three options for structural support. These were:
 - a. Option 1: Short-term surface repairs with no improvement to the Grotto's maintenance regime
 - b. Option 2: As per Option 1 plus repairs to address internal and structural defects and an improved maintenance regime
 - c. Option 3: As per Options 1 and 2, plus the restoration of specific features such as the stone steps adjacent to the main façade, re-profiling of window arches and reinstatement of some of the original fabric.

14. The consultant's findings and stakeholder feedback can be summarised as follows:
 - a. None of the options fall within the existing repairs budget of £164k
 - b. Further funding needs to be identified to undertake the restoration works required for the Grotto to be removed from the HARR
 - c. Historic England considered that, as a minimum, repairs as described in Option 1 with elements of Option 2, would be sufficient to remove the Grotto from the HARR.
 - d. HOLT and Friends of Wanstead Parklands expressed a strong preference for the more ambitious, and costly, options 2 and 3, with HE advising a wider parkland approach.
 - e. All participants expressed a preference for the partial reconstruction of brick walls along the footprint of the original boathouse, perpendicular to the Grotto façade, to provide the necessary structural support.
 - f. Raising the water level in Ornamental Water will take place as soon as the appropriate licence is obtained from the Environment Agency as part of a project to reinstate the pumping system between the water bodies in the park. This is expected to be achieved in Winter 2025/2026, providing a window of circa 18 months for works to the Grotto to be delivered without the additional challenge of working next to water.

15. Following the workshop, the project team and consultant team updated the repair options based on the feedback received, providing more detail on risks, project timeframes and fundraising opportunities. These options are presented below, with further information provided in Appendix 1.

Options

Option	Description	Risk	Cost Range
Option A	Essential repairs to remove the structure from the Heritage at Risk Register,	Whilst this option is considered sufficient to remove from HARR	£355k-£403k (including

	plus internal and structural repairs required to maintain the Grotto in good condition for the longer-term. This includes the development of a ten-year maintenance plan.	it doesn't result in a comprehensive restoration; Exceeds current budget.	£296k - £336k for works and an estimated 20% for associated consultant fees and staff costs).
Option B	Essential and recommended repairs in Options A, plus the restoration of specific features, such as the stone steps adjacent to the main façade, re-profiling of window arches and reinstatement of some of the original fabric onto the façade. Enhance the immediate setting of the Grotto within the landscape and waterscape.	Whilst this option is considered sufficient to remove from HARR and results in a comprehensive restoration, it significantly exceeds current budget and significantly increases the complexity and timescale of the works.	£1.09M-£1.2M (including £910k-£1M for works an estimated 20% for associated consultant fees and staff costs).

16. The indicative project programme for Option A would be circa 21 months from July 2024 to completion of works in April 2026, assuming all funding and consents are in place. This would include an opportunity between June 2025 and October 2025 to complete repair works on the Landing Stage and the lakeside elevation of the Grotto in dry conditions, prior to the raising of the water level in Ornamental Water in Winter 2025/26.

17. For Option B, the indicative programme is estimated to be circa 27 months from July 2024 to completion of works in October 2027, assuming all funding and consents are in place. Works on site would commence in wet conditions, following the raising of the water level in Ornamental Water.

18. The project board met on 7 May 2024 to consider Options A and B. External stakeholders remained in favour of a more ambitious restoration that would require financial support from National Lottery Heritage Fund or Natural England to address the significant funding gap. However, Historic England noted that Option A would also provide a satisfactory solution to enable removal from HARR and HE are supportive of Option A. The project board agreed that both options be put to Members of this Committee for their consideration.

19. Since the project board in May, Alan Baxter Associates have continued to progress the development of the RMP with a focus on prioritising the essential works to remove the Grotto from the HARR as per Option A. Additional consultant work would be required to update the RMP to support the delivery of

Option B. The cost of this additional consultant work would exceed the existing £85k budget allocated through the Cyclical Works Programme and would need to be incorporated into the overall fundraising target for that option.

20. With confirmation that cost of any option to repair/restoration of the Grotto will exceed £250k, this activity now constitutes a project under the corporate project procedure. It needs to enter the gateway process and be scrutinised by Members from this point onwards. Therefore, the reason for engaging Members now is:
- a. officers now understand the likely repair cost meets the threshold for a corporate project and
 - b. that further work on the RMP is predicated on a specific repair option, the scope and subsequent delivery of which needs Committee approval.

Proposals

21. Officers now seek the views of this Committee on current options to maintain and restore the Grotto.
22. A second stakeholder workshop is planned to review further progress by the consultant team on the production of the RMP.
23. Subject to this Committee's views on the options as presented, the project team will now develop and pursue a fundraising strategy to bridge the current funding gap. This work will be coordinated by the Wanstead Park Programme Board, to ensure that fundraising activities across the suite of Wanstead Park projects are complementary.
24. To date, officers have identified funding routes, both internal and external, including the timetables for relevant grant applications and have also commenced discussions with the Chamberlains Department, to inform our approach with National Lottery and Natural England on the process to seek and secure funding for the options presented. For option A, which could be funded either by the Corporation, subject to its priorities or through a stream-lined grant application process, this can be progressed using existing officer resources. For option B, which will require a much larger external grant, this will require a dedicated resource to research, prepare, advocate and monitor the more complex grant application process.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – The activities, projects and works outlined in this report directly contribute towards the achievement of five of the six outcomes set out in the City of London Corporate Plan 2024-29, including: Diverse Engaged Communities, Vibrant Thriving Destination, Flourishing Public Spaces, Providing Excellent Services and Leading Sustainable Environment. At Departmental level, the management of heritage assets in our care continues to support the Environment Department's vision to Shape Sustainable Future Environments through its Primary and

Supporting Aims and Objectives and contribute to the outcomes identified in the Natural Environment Division's strategic framework.

Financial implications – A funding gap of circa £350k based on the preferred option (option 2), to deliver the necessary repairs to support removal of the Grotto from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register has been reported to Chamberlain's Department. A number of funding sources will now need to be explored within a coordinated fundraising strategy to ensure that the project is fully funded.

Resource implications – Officers from the Culture and Projects Section can continue to provide client-side support to Epping Forest charity in order to progress these repairs as a project within the gateway process, however, charity funding would need to be sought to cover the associated staff costs. Subject to the option(s) pursued, dedicated fundraising expertise may need to be commissioned with the costs of this needing to be met.

Legal implications – As the asset owner of Wanstead Grotto, Epping Forest charity has a duty to effect repairs and maintenance to support its removal from the HARR.

Risk implications – The Grotto is statutorily protected and its current condition and listing on the Heritage at Risk Register is a reputational and health & safety risk to the Corporation. There are additional risks associated with each option as presented, not least, the current funding gap for each respective repair option.

Equalities implications – As a project within the corporate gateway process, the repair of Wanstead Grotto will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment and be conducted in accordance with our public Sector Equality Duty 2010 and all relevant Corporation policies and procedures.

Climate implications – Extreme weather events will continue to impact on heritage assets particularly those that are within open spaces. Hence it is critical to have these sites cyclically surveyed and appropriately maintained.

Security implications – None at present

Conclusion

25. The Grotto's current condition and listing on the Heritage at Risk Register is a reputational and health and safety risk to the City Corporation, at a time when it is promoting itself as a custodian of public assets. Its removal from the HARR would be a significant demonstration of how we maintain and enhance flourishing public spaces.

26. The restoration of The Grotto is a complex project, with a number of key stakeholders and heritage and environmental considerations, which all have the potential to increase the duration, risks and costs associated with the project.

27. Guided by Members, officers will continue to work with national and local stakeholders to ensure that our shared ambitions for maintaining and enhancing The Grotto within the wider Parkland Plan can be delivered on a sustainable basis.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Presentation of Options A and B to Project Board (May 2024)

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