

Committee(s)	Dated: 10 th March 2016
Wanstead Park Working Party	
Subject: Wanstead Park Rhododendron surveys 2013 and 14	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest	For Information

Summary

Rhododendron ponticum was first introduced to England from SW Spain in 1763 and was much used in landscaping schemes through the 18th and 19th century. This report summarises the findings of the Wanstead Park Rhododendron surveys of 2013 and 2014 by Lear Associates. The aims of these studies were to:

- Locate old Rhododendron plantings
- Focus on plants with distinctive attributes

The study identified that Rhododendron *sps.* are a notable heritage feature and that significance includes both rare or unusual cultivars and the landscape use of Rhododendron at Wanstead Park.

The Epping Forest Management Plans 2010 class *R. ponticum* as an invasive non-native species (INNS) and is the subject of a removal programme within Epping Forest. This report highlights the potential need to exclude the Rhododendron at Wanstead Park from the Epping Forest eradication programme.

Proposals for taking forward the conclusions of the survey have been made.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to: Note the report

Main Report

Background

Rhododendron ponticum (*R. ponticum*) and its hybrids are native to parts of Iberia, Eastern Europe and western Asia. *R. ponticum* was first introduced to England from SW Spain in 1763 and was much used in landscaping schemes through the 18th and 19th century. *R. ponticum* forms extensive dense thickets, which cast deep shade, leading to a loss of woodland ground flora, reducing epiphytic bryophytes and lichens, modifying local fauna and reducing tree regeneration.

The Epping Forest Management Plans (1998-2003, 2004-2010) class *R. ponticum* as an invasive non-native species (INNS) and is the subject of a removal programme within Epping Forest. *R. ponticum* is also a host species for *Phytophthora ramorum*, the fungi responsible for Sudden Oak Death (SOD). The new management plan will consider the necessity of removing all *R. ponticum* from Epping Forest as a precaution against infection by SOD.

Surveys were undertaken in 2013 and 2014 by Lear Associates to assess the heritage significance of Rhododendrons growing in Wanstead Park. The principal aims of the survey were to:

- Locate old Rhododendron plantings
- Focus on plants with distinctive attributes

The survey comprised of two field visits by Michael Lear with the results presented in two annual reports.

This report outlines the main findings of these surveys and makes recommendations on how we can use the knowledge gained in the heritage management of Wanstead Park.

The Summary Findings of the 2013 and 2014 Surveys

A total of 56 plants were assessed with the majority of plants recorded being *Rhododendron ponticum* (or close hybrids) with a number of plants considered to be over 150 years old and possibly as much as 200.

Archive research highlights that Wanstead Park was amongst the first garden landscape to utilize *R. ponticum*. Planting dates at Wanstead were between 1764 and 1784.

There is no evidence of more modern (later 19th and early 20th century) planting of Rhododendrons in Wanstead Park.

Highly probable that Rhododendrons formed an intrinsic part of the later 18th – early 19th century landscape design. As such they should be considered as being of heritage significance within the site.

Large Rhododendron cultivars appear to have been used to flank vistas, paths and avenues such as the Long Walk. Dwarf cultivars appear to have been associated with rockwork areas of the park, such as around The Grotto.

There is at least one notable plant, *R maximum*, identified which should be considered for propagation.

Proposal

It is proposed that:

- Rhododendrons should be considered as a natural heritage asset at Wanstead Park with their conservation needs identified in future plans for conservation plans for Wanstead Park and would be retained against a wider programme of *R. ponticum* extermination in Epping Forest.
- The former landscape use of Rhododendrons should form part of the thinking for future landscape conservation plans for Wanstead Park.

Conclusion

Following a survey of Wanstead Park *Rhododendron* sps. have been found to have a notable heritage significance. This significance includes both rare or unusual cultivars and the landscape use of at Wanstead Park. Landscape conservation proposals for Rhododendron have been made which will conflict with wider management plan objectives for widespread eradication.

Background Papers:

Wanstead Park Rhododendron Survey 2013, Lear Associates

Wanstead Park Rhododendron Survey 2014, Lear Associates

Geoff Sinclair, Head of Operations

T: 020 532 1010/Direct 0208 532 5301

Email: geoff.sinclair@cityoflondon.gov.uk