

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 21 JUNE 2023**

COUNCILLORS Margaret Greer (Chair), Mahmut Aksanoglu (Vice-Chair), Maria Alexandrou, Nawshad Ali, Hivran Dalkaya, James Hockney and Michael Rye OBE

ABSENT Kate Anolue

STATUTORY CO-OPTees: *1 vacancy (Church of England diocese representative), vacancy (other faiths/denominations representative), vacancy (Catholic diocese representative), Alicia Meniru & 1 vacancy (Parent Governor representative) - Italics Denotes absence*

OFFICERS: Simon Pollock, (Executive Director of Environment & Communities), Cheryl Headon (Interim Director of Parks, Leisure & Culture), Jamie Kukadia (Senior Engineer, Watercourses), Ian Russell (Principal Engineer, Watercourses Team) and Stacey Gilmour (Governance & Scrutiny Officer)

Also Attending: Cllr Reece Fox (Call-In Lead), Cllr Chinelo Anyanwu (Cabinet Member for Public Spaces, Culture & Local Economy), Simon Allin (Local Press Officer), Cllr Hannah Dyson (observing)

WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

The Chair explained that the purpose of the meeting was for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider the reasons the decision had been called-in in relation to the following item:

Item: Non-key decision List 02 23/24 – Portfolio Report to Introduce Conservation Grazing to Selected Parks in Enfield. Councillor Chinelo Anyanwu, Cabinet Member for Public Spaces, Culture & Local Economy was present in relation to this item. Officers were also present.

The Committee noted that Councillor Reece Fox would present the reasons for the call-in as the Lead Member.

**2
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3
DECISION CALLED-IN-NON-KEY - PORTFOLIO DECISION TO
INTRODUCE CONSERVATION GRAZING TO SELECTED PARKS IN
ENFIELD**

Details of the decision taken and issued on 6th June 2023, had been included on the Publication of Decision List No. 02/23-24. The report also set out officer responses to the reason or call-in.

The decision had been called in for review by 7 members of the Council: Councillors Reece Fox (Lead), Joanne Laban, Chris Dey, Lee Chamberlain, Hannah Dyson, Alessandro Georgiou and David Skelton.

3.1 REASONS FOR CALL-IN-NON-KEY PORTFOLIO DECISION TO INTRODUCE CONSERVATION GRAZING TO SELECTED PARKS IN ENFIELD

The reasons for the call-in were presented by Councillor Reece Fox as Lead Member.

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RESPONSE TO REASONS FOR CALL-IN-NON-KEY PORTFOLIO DECISION TO INTRODUCE CONSERVATION GRAZING TO SELECTED PARKS IN ENFIELD

Councillor Reece Fox, Call-In Lead Member, summarised concerns /objections received by local resident groups and the comments received via Whitewebbs Ward Councillors. It was felt that the overall idea had not been adequately tested, and as the consultation period only ran for 10 days, the scheme had been rushed through. Baseline surveys had not been conducted and factors raised by the public had not been assessed. Possible unprecedented behaviour of the herds, escapee animals venturing to the surrounding busy roads, causing hazards for dog walkers/passers-by/other animals raised cause for concern, as well as the welfare of the herd. There had been no special measures implemented to safeguard protected species or the impact on the heritage site as a whole.

As Enfield is an urban setting, it was not deemed a suitable site compared to settings such as Epping Forest and Cambridge where conservation grazing has already been implemented. Public access to the area has been questioned by the local community.

The Chair asked the Cabinet Member for comments who in turn asked Officers for their technical responses as follows:

Cheryl Headon, Interim Director of Leisure, Parks and Culture, advised the report was a proposal of a trial delivered in partnership with Capel Manor College, with support from National England and Historic England. The trial includes the proposal to use very low stocking level of cattle to be introduced in phases. The cattle identified will be fitted with GPS trackers by professional experts in line with a robust project plan and risk assessments.

The choice to use Forty Hall in Enfield was due to its urban similarity to Wanstead.

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Clear signage will be in place, providing detailed information about the cattle, why they are there and guidance for the public visitors. Increased officer presence will be available once the site is open to the public.

The Chair welcomed questions from other members of the committee:

Q1. Regarding dog walking, are there going to be any closed off areas?

A1. The park will not have any new physical boundaries and will remain fully open to all park users.

Q2. What is the robust project plan?

A2. A very detailed project plan which includes milestones, what needs to be achieved, and how the approach will be phased. Through the project plan, all risk assessments will be under constant review with the input of the public in all phases.

Q3. The main concerns appear to be the risk assessments, how many have been undertaken?

A3. Assurance by Officers that a robust risk assessment process, enhanced over the past 1.5 years, had been conducted with continued engagement with relative partners such as Epping Forest and Cambridge. The Grazing Managers there provided invaluable expert information and advice for the scheme to be implemented in the safest way possible. Initial consultations last year highlighted some areas of concern and these risks have been factored into the assessment, revising it as changes identified. Further changes to enhance the experience and avoid risk is to introduce codes on signs that can be scanned to take visitors directly to their chosen destinations. A "Meet the Cattle" Day will be arranged to provide awareness and educational advice on the aspects of the area as a whole. Dog owners will need to be reminded to keep their animals under control to avoid any issues.

Q4. What is the long-term plan after the trial period has ceased?

A4. The trial is part of the development of a Conservation Grazing Strategy, being the overall purpose of the trial. Therefore, the trial forms part of the process to get continuous feedback from public engagement to ensure longer term success of the scheme.

Q5. Are the small electric shocks administered to the cattle by the GPS collars dangerous?

A5. The GPS collars administer a very small, mild pinch by way of an alert and only work when the cattle are about to cross over the designated boundaries. They initially get an audio alert, the response level is very effective, and they are quick to get accustomed to the bleeping noises, therefore the shock stage is rarely administered. This system is deemed more human in comparison to barbed wire or electric fences etc.

Q6. Why was consultation only 10 days?

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A6. The consultation period began online on 20th June until the 10th July 2022 and further comments continued to be received up until the 22nd July 2022.

Q7. How were the stakeholders approached, and what was the feedback?

A7. Many forms of media were used for the consultation. Officers provided advice on site on the day, information available online and posters offering details. Feedback from Friends of Whitewebbs Park was instrumental in avoiding the use of Whitewebbs Park from the proposal therefore removed from the report/plan. Information from enhanced signage and QR codes have helped concerned dog walkers feel more comfortable and safer. Many other signs are also available. Numerous volunteers have come forward and are willing to monitor the cattle and check their whereabouts and any further concerns were fully considered and included in the risk assessment.

Q8. There are many dog walkers using the park early in the mornings, therefore there is a conflict of usage. As 40% of space is being taken away from Forty Hall, in comparison to Trent Park, there is a disproportionality represented, resulting in cattle being allocated a more confined space than Trent Park? Was fencing considered? The area being considered is the most used, ie, the top path and gate. Signage needs to be visual and not just language based so everyone can understand the information.

A8. Signage is visual and an example can be circulated if required and formed part of the Communication plan for the project. Fences have not been considered as traditionally these landscapes would have been grazed, creating an enhanced eco system. GPS trackers allow different areas of the park to be grazed at different times, thus avoiding the need to move fences etc.

The Chair requested that anything Officers are referring to such as signage, QR codes etc should have been presented at the call-in meeting and going forward for all future Call-Ins, this should be taken on board. Noted by all.

Q9. Do any other Boroughs use the GPS tracker systems and are there any learning curves evident?

A9. A few Local Authorities use this technology already. Epping Forest have used GPS collars for many years and find them effective. If cattle receive shocks, the Grazing Manager gets an alert on the phone and precedes to check the animal in question. There is also a 24-hour emergency call to control the boundary. Concerns regarding cattle falling into Brooks has been raised by other authorities and Enfield are monitoring and assessing the hazards continually. The primary driver for this project is not saving money but preserving the heritage of the site. If successful, the Countryside Stewardship Payment may be obtainable but moving forward, the estimated £10K required will need to be managed through expenditure reductions from the Parks budget and has already been allocated for this trial.

Q10. From the 132 responses to the consultation, how many were yes or no?

A10. The responses were not received in a Yes/No manner. There were some for and some against. Some responses liked the idea but had concerns

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which were addressed. More positive responses were received than negative. The project will be measured based on the baseline survey with the aim of using the cattle to “listen to tape” on a trial basis, also measuring responses from the public as the trial progresses. There are regular check points throughout the trial with a clear criterion.

Q11. In respect of the electric shocks and a visual perimeter being created, these audio alerts are not natural to the wild animal. This together with boundaries changing which cause confusion for the animals, is this fair?

A11. Wired fencing is a less humane method. The cattle have been trained to receive audio alerts and are pain free. The Officers have worked with cattle experts for advice on this and panel members were encouraged meet with the experts on site upon request if required.

Q12. Where does the trial fit into the relevance of the Council Plan and Strategies?

A12. This does not fall into any specific area, but forms part of the Parks Management Plan. By the end of the trial, there will be a better understanding of the cost savings.

Q13. Please expand on production of meat at Forty Hall and will schools be invited for educational reasons.

A13. Forty Hall already have some red bull cattle grazing in the farm and this meat is sold at the farm, generating some income for the farm not the Council. Schools will be welcome to attend for educational purposes.

Q14. As most residents use the end area intended for the cattle as a walkway, 40% of the land is unreasonably too much.

A14. Not all the area will be used at any one time and cattle will move around to graze. As part of the introduction, the Council is committed to listening to feedback as project progresses with consultation work taking place on the “Meet the Cattle” Days and ongoing engagement with park users and stakeholders.

Q15. If agreed, what is the timeline if this goes through today?

A15. The infrastructure will be in place over the next 2/3 weeks and the programme of works will be rolled out thereafter.

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ORIGINAL DECISION OF CALL-IN-NON-KEY PORTFOLIO DECISION TO INTRODUCE CONSERVATION GRAZING TO SELECTED PARKS IN ENFIELD

The Call-In Lead, Cllr Reece Fox, summarised the points made during the discussion and called for the decision to be referred back to the Cabinet Member to be looked at again as he felt that his concerns had not been adequately addressed.

The Chair, Cllr Margaret Greer, advised that as this was a trial project, there will be an opportunity to review some of the boundaries and the brook as the

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trial progresses. The outcome of the “Meet the Cattle Days” will be clearer once more have taken place. The Chair also reiterated again that in future examples and information relevant to the Call-In should be made available at the meeting.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the reasons provided for the Call-In and responses set out in the Officer’s report. Having considered the verbal responses and the information presented by the Cabinet Member for Public Spaces, Culture and Local Economy and relevant Officers, the Committee **AGREED** to confirm the original decision made by the Cabinet Member of Public Spaces, Culture and Local Economy.