

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 21 June 2023

Officer Response: Conservative Group Call-in by Cllr Reece Fox of Decision List 02 (23-24) – Portfolio Report to Introduce Conservation Grazing to Selected parks in Enfield

Reasons for the “Call in” are detailed below:

Reason for call-in
The introduction of cattle to the public spaces will exclude potential users from and reduce public access to the park. Residents are concerned that this is not the most appropriate site, and that risks to park users and to their enjoyment of the park have been properly assessed
Officer response
<p>These proposed sites have been chosen carefully as they are large country parks with plenty of space to accommodate both cattle and people who may wish to see the cattle and the other wildlife they help to encourage or may prefer to stay away from them. Cattle numbers will be kept low to ensure that only a small proportion of each site is occupied at any one time, ensuring that park visitors who wish to stay away from cattle always have the option of doing so. Signage will be used on all major entrance ways to inform people of the presence of livestock, which will include a QR code linking to a live map showing where the cattle are grazing (through the GPS Collar Technology). Park visitors and dog walkers can choose to avoid the areas where the cattle are grazing should they wish to.</p> <p>Project risks have been assessed through the development of risk assessments as described below. These have been reviewed by Enfield Council officers and project partners including the Forty Hall Farm manager and experts from outside Enfield such as the Epping Forest Grazing Manager who has wide experience of managing similar projects in public spaces.</p>

Reason for call-in
Risk Assessments have not been carried out. Concerns have been expressed about arrangements for managing any accidents to the cattle – the area chosen is not readily accessible by vehicles, even tractors. It is unclear how the public will be made aware of where the grazing areas are.
Officer response
A detailed Project Plan with associated risk assessments and key activities and milestones has been produced, which details the measures that will be implemented to ensure the project is conducted safely. This provides information regarding risk control measures and contingency plans. This Project Plan has been developed in consultation with the Epping Forest Grazing Manager, who has extensive experience in grazing animals in publicly accessible open spaces including Wanstead Park,

which is a notably urban area with high visitor numbers.

Ongoing assessment and monitoring of welfare and behaviour of the cattle will be undertaken using GPS technology, regular site visits by the grazing staff and feedback from volunteer Lookers. The selected grazing areas can be accessed by vehicles such as tractors.

Signage will be used on all major entrance ways to inform people of the presence of livestock, which will include a QR code linking to a live map showing where the cattle are grazing.

Reason for call-in

Forty Hall is situated in the London Borough of Enfield in an urban setting although the landscape very much feels like countryside. This is a very different setting to Epping Forest and Cambridge where cattle grazing schemes have been implemented. Enfield's setting as an urban park and its challenge is not conducive to cattle grazing.

Officer response

Forty Hall is a large country park adjacent to a farm. It has a wide range of typically rural features and characteristics and does not feel like an urban park, there is a road on one side but this is separated from the park by a dense area of shrubs and trees. The cattle grazing project in Cambridge on the other hand is very close to the city centre (just a 100 metres or so from busy urban streets).

Reason for call-in

Dogs walked at Forty Hall often have poor recall being in an urban setting. The viability of cattle grazing alongside ensuring the park can continue to be enjoyed by dog walkers has not been properly assessed.

Officer response

The key measures that will be in place to reduce the potential for negative interactions between livestock, people and dogs include:

- Livestock selection – the cattle being utilised for the project are Red Polls which are known for their docile nature
- Use of leads – it is not an essential requirement for dog owners to keep their dogs on leads within grazing areas, there are many examples of successful grazing projects that do not require this including the aforementioned projects at Epping Forest, Wanstead Park and in Cambridge city centre, nevertheless, dog owners will be encouraged to be responsible and keep their dogs on leads if they have any concerns regarding their dogs' behaviour when in close proximity to cattle

- Retaining areas free from cattle – at each site the grazing area will be confined to ensure that there is ample space for dogs to run freely off the lead and stay well away from grazing animals if needed (grazing areas will cover up to 40% of the available space at Forty Hall and just 15% at Trent Park)
- Low stocking densities – the number of cattle that would be introduced would be a maximum of 20 at Trent Park and 10 at Forty Hall

Reason for call-in

The City of London Corporation, Epping Forrest, Wanstead have 30-year grazing strategy. Enfield Council does not have a management plan that incorporates grazing into it and is agreed to by the Parks Dept that would include cutting and bailing once a year.

Officer response

This project is a 12-month trial after which the benefits of this approach will be assessed before any long-term decisions regarding future management of the parks are made.

Reason for call-in

When the scheme was first introduced in June 2022, the consultation only lasted ten days which residents and Friends groups feel was not enough time to discuss and consider the implications.

Officer response

The consultation lasted for 3 weeks, not 10 days. It was available online from Monday 20th June to Sunday 10th July and was supported by face to face events. A 'Meet the Cattle' event was held at Forty Hall Farm on the afternoon of 29th June 2022, where park goers could see the Red Poll cattle at close hand and discuss the project with the project team including the Grazing Manager. Comments regarding the project continued to be accepted as part of the consultation up to 27th July 2022. This effectively extended the consultation period by a further 17 days to 38 days in total.

Reason for call-in

The impact on environment of the scheme has not been assessed. Nutrient neutrality, impact on flora and fauna (bats, GCN, moths, butterflies, insects, rare flora) and disturbance to the unimproved grassland habitat, are important considerations to prepare for conservation grazing. None of these factors have been assessed and there is a general feeling the scheme is being rushed through.

Officer response

The environmental impact has been carefully considered with advice from experts at Natural England, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Capel Manor College, Forty Hall Farm and Epping Forest. The proposal has been in development for over a year which is considered sufficient to ensure it is not being rushed.

Reason for call-in

The council stated in July 2022 that it would be arranging baseline surveys to assess a baseline condition, which is a critical element of the project from the Forty Hall perspective. Baseline surveys have not been conducted.

Officer response

Baseline surveys were carried out by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust in Summer 2022. Follow up surveys will be conducted when grazing has been introduced to determine the impact and benefits for flora and fauna.

Reason for call-in

Impact on heritage asset - potential damage to the Scheduled Monument and historic landscape, it was clear that some infrastructure would be required, such as signage, troughs and watering devices. There are also issues around the potential collapse of culverts from Elsyng. Consideration of these impacts and mitigation did not appear to have been considered fully.

Officer response

Historic England are very supportive of these proposals because using cattle to manage grassland landscapes, as has been done for hundreds of years prior to the introduction of large mechanized equipment in the twentieth century, is considered to reduce the risk of damage to historical artefacts and landscapes. Using cattle rather than heavy mechanical equipment reduces the risk of culvert collapses.

Reason for call-in

Animal husbandry issues haven't been adequately addressed. It is unclear who would look after the cattle, help cattle if they get trapped, ensure adequate water resources, additional feed etc. It remains unclear how this would be managed apart from being the responsibility of Capel Manor/ Forty Hall Farm. It seems that access to water will tie grazing to certain locations.

Officer response

These issues have been considered in detail as part of the Project Plan and overall project management. The cattle will be primarily cared for by the grazing manager at Forty Hall Farm with support from Enfield Council Parks staff and some volunteer Lookers where appropriate.

Proposal: Councillor Reece has asked that the decision is referred back to the decision maker.