1. **Recommendation**

1.1. The Select Committee is asked to note the content of the report.

2. **Introduction**

2.1. At the meeting of the Sustainable Development Select Committee on 11th December 2017, the Committee resolved to receive an information item looking at Beckenham Place Park.

2.2. This report seeks to inform the committee of the project’s progress to date and plans for the future of the park.

3. **The physical restoration of the park**

3.1. Following the Heritage Lottery fund’s grant award in December 2016 from the Parks for People fund, Council officers have been working with architects and landscape architects to make the vision of restoration for this park become a reality.

3.2. Over the past year tenders were undertaken for the appointment of heritage architects to lead on the detailed design of the buildings to be restored, and landscape architects to lead on the detailed design of the landscape changes, including the creation of the lake. Since then designs have been developed, both in conjunction with discussions with planners, and to ready the project for tender of the works packages.

3.3. Planning permission was secured in October 2017. Currently the building restoration contract is being tendered, and the landscape package of works will be tendered at the end of January 2018. It is expected that works will begin in the park in April 2018 and be completed in May 2019.

3.4. In order to carry out tree works at a seasonally appropriate time, it was necessary to tender this aspect of the work separately. Tree works have begun in the park already and will completed by early Feb 2018. Trees are being moved from the landscape for a number of reasons:

- To remove dead and diseased trees that may pose a risk to other trees or to the public using the park
• To remove poorer quality trees that are preventing other trees from reaching their full potential in a parkland setting
• To improve sightlines across the park allowing visitors to enjoy the rare expanse of space and improving feelings of safety
• To restore the eighteenth century parkland feel – open grassland with individual, celebrated parkland trees. To the Heritage Lottery Funders it is key to restore the landscape as a historic parkland associated with the mansion. Removing linear fairway planting undertaken as part of the golf course in the 1990s is part of this vision.

3.5. In addition to tree removal, already 5 acres of new woodland has been planted, together with 25 new parkland trees. An orchard and further parkland trees are also planned.

3.6. For further details on trees in Beckenham Place Park. Please refer to the public leaflet (appendix 1).

4. **The eastern side of the park**

4.1. At the project’s inception it was hoped that the regeneration of the park would be run as one – the restoration of the western side of the park and the regeneration of the eastern side of the park in association with the Environment Agency’s flood alleviation scheme here. Unfortunately, the complexity of the EA’s scheme has led to significant delays such that the designs for the flood alleviation scheme are still evolving. It was not therefore possible to submit a planning application for Beckenham Place Park’s restoration, which included both sides of the park, as the regeneration of the eastern side is so closely dependent on the flood alleviation scheme.

4.2. As owners of the flood alleviation scheme, the Environment Agency is leading on the regeneration of this part of the park. A planning application for this area, together with all the other sites affected by the flood alleviation scheme, is expected to be submitted by the EA by summer of this year, and it is hoped that works will begin here in spring 2019. Although the EA are leading on this aspect of the project, Lewisham’s project manager and architects are involved in the design to ensure it mirrors the western side of the park and that once complete, the park will be experienced, as far as possible, as one open space.

4.3. A large playground will be sited in this part of the park, as well as toilets and a refreshment kiosk. It is currently anticipated these works will be complete by summer 2020.

5. **The BMX track**

5.1. The new BMX track was funded by Access Sport and forms part of the HLF park regeneration project. The build was completed in August 2017 and local children and young people started using it immediately. The launch event in September 2017 was a great success and saw the creation of an attractive mural on the old changing room building as well.
5.2. As well as ongoing informal riding, a club has been established, run by local volunteers, operating each Sunday from 12-2. Equipment is available to borrow, and in the first two months of operation the club saw 200 young people join in club sessions, 50% of which were from BAME groups, 25% were female, 12% were disabled and 20% were previously inactive young people.

5.3. Access Sport has also worked with schools in community outreach sessions, drawing more young people to use the track and building confidence with cycling skills. Participating schools have been Sedgehill, Coninsborough College, Brent Knoll, St Augustine’s and TLG Lewisham pupil referral unit.

6. Activities and Events in the park

6.1. Following the closure of the golf course at the end of Oct 2016, the number of visitors to the park has increased, and the variety of activities that park users are engaged in has significantly broadened. Several regular organised activities now take place in the park:

- Tai chi
- Boot camp
- Little explorers
- Walking group
- Forest school sessions

6.2. The park now also hosts many opportunities for volunteering:

- Nature’s Gym
- Weekly volunteer group, 10am-1pm
- Monthly volunteer group
- Friends volunteering in Sensory Garden

6.3. We now are regularly approached by local organisations looking for a venue for sporting events as well and have hosted several runs and cycling events in the park. Wide Horizons will also begin delivering regular adventure learning sessions to schools in the park this term and Coninsborough College continue to work in the park with their special unit every week.

6.4. In addition, as part of the regeneration project, Lewisham Council held a public vote for the re-invention of the much-loved squirrel sculpture, and well attended, free, half term activities. In September a community engagement officer was appointed for the project, and she is working hard to draw new audiences to the park.

6.5. The mansion was leased to RJK properties from November 2016 onwards, and this has also helped to increase footfall in the park and the variety of activities available to the public. RJK undertook repairs to the building, and since spring 2017, the mansion has been open to the public every day. Park users are able to wander into the house to appreciate the heritage, architecture and plasterwork, as well as to join in activities held in the mansion: arts and crafts, yoga, pilates, capoeira, preschool activities and the Friends’ run visitors’ centre.
6.6. The café was renovated and has been open since Dec 2016, in the basement of the mansion. The first floor is also currently in full use, with artists' studios and two residential caretaker flats.

6.7. RJK properties and the Council have worked together to host a number of highly successful public events over the past year:

- Festival of Lights Christmas event (2016 and 2017)
- Mansion opening (April 2017)
- Park feast (Sept 2017)
- Soundwalk launch (Sept 2017)
- Children’s film festival and open-air cinema (Sept 2017)
- Open House London (Sept 2017)

6.8. Together these events have brought over 7000 visitors to the park, many of whom have come for the first time.

6.9. In addition, two particularly special community projects were run in spring/summer 2017. A group of children from Conisborough College’s Progress Unit came to the park each week to plan and then create a chicken garden by the café. Chickens and guinea pigs came to the park for the summer and were admired by thousands of park users. They were cared for by those living in the mansion, as well as by volunteers. The children celebrated their work and success at a special chicken garden opening, in which the local sponsor (Acorn Properties) cut the ribbon.

6.10. The other community project was known as Park Feast. Although this culminated in a fabulous harvest feast, the project invited people to participate in a straw bale community garden situated on one of the former tennis courts. Many people participated in one or more of a series of associated workshops (from scarecrow making to natural dyeing) and others got involved in planting the garden. A core group of volunteers, many of whom had mental health issues or were out of work, tended the garden frequently and picked the produce. They then helped to prepare for the feast, making table decorations, dyeing napkins and preparing food. 80 people attended the feast – eating in mansion’s dining room, and celebrating the success of the project and the sense of community and belonging it engendered.

6.11. The Council intend to run Park feast again in 2018, and are continuing to work with Coninsborough College. It is hoped that the chickens will also return in the warmer weather!

6.12. Other events planned for 2018 are:

- Flower Festival – 21st and 22nd June 2018, involving schools growing competitions and allotments, and celebrating the gardens of Beckenham Place Park.
- Festival of Sport – 14th July 2018 - to be held on the eastern side of the park, celebrating the many active possibilities the park holds, and encouraging people to have a go.
7. **Other Buildings with Beckenham Place Park**

7.1. The stable block, the stable cottages and the gardener’s cottage will be fully restored as part of the regeneration works. Southend Lodge and gate house, at the Beckenham Hill Road entrance to Beckenham Place Park will be externally restored.

7.2. The mansion and the Foxgrove sit outside the HLF project. Although works have already been carried out to the mansion, significant funds are required to restore it fully and to achieve sustainable long term use.

7.3. In July 2017 officers took a report to Mayor and Cabinet which set out the intention with regards to these buildings. It was agreed that long term leases should not be let on these until the park restoration was complete and the uplift in visitor numbers and visitor diversity has been achieved. The project team will instead consider letting both the Foxgrove and the mansion for the medium term.

7.4. At the same time Council officers intend to approach the Heritage lottery fund for an initial (Round 1) Heritage Grant in order to begin to work up proposals and options for the restoration and use of the building whilst the tenant is in occupation, as it will be necessary to endeavour to keep the building in occupation for security reasons, until major restoration works begin.

8. **Further implications**

8.1. In terms of finances, the park project is largely funded by the HLF grant. Lewisham Council is making a financial contribution to the flood alleviation scheme specifically and to the restoration of the stableyard cottages. In addition section 106 funds have been identified for the project.

8.2. The ongoing revenue implications of the park’s restoration should be positive overall, as the potential to earn revenue from the park and its buildings increases significantly, and the maintenance costs do not increase beyond the maintenance required by the former golf course.

8.3. Officers are working to ensure the project improves the ecological value of the park and draws in a significantly larger audience particularly from groups who are less inclined to use open spaces generally.

8.4. Please refer to the financial, environmental, equalities and other implications set out in the Mayor and Cabinet report for more detail.

9. **Background Documents**

9.1. Mayor and Cabinet report Beckenham Place Park 19th July 2017


9.2. If you have any questions about this report, please contact Alison Taylor, Project Manager (ext.49758)