

Sustainable Development Select Committee		
Title	Beckenham Place Park Regeneration scrutiny paper	
Contributor	Executive Director for Customer Services	Item 5
Class	Part 1 (open)	20 April 2017

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report to the Sustainable Development Select Committee sets out the progress made on the regeneration of Beckenham Place Park to date, and the proposed next steps for the regeneration of the landscape and the park's buildings.
- 1.2 On 17th February 2016, the Mayor took the decision to close the golf course which had been operating in Beckenham Place Park for many decades, following a report to Mayor and Cabinet and a prior report to the Sustainable Development Committee in January 2016. Golf ceased operation in the park on 31st October 2016 and the regeneration of the park has progressed well since.

2. Summary

- 2.1 On 10th July 2013, Mayor and Cabinet approved the submission of bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for financial support for a Beckenham Place Park regeneration project.
- 2.2 The HLF 'Parks for People' bid was successful in phase 1 and funding of £4.9m was set aside for the project in summer 2014.
- 2.3 A small proportion of the Heritage Lottery Funds were made available to carry out consultation, engage partners and work up the initial designs to become detailed designs and plans for the park. Following approval by Mayor and Cabinet on 17th February 2016, to close the golf course and progress with the regeneration plans, these plans were worked up in earnest, and submitted back to Parks for People in a Round 2 bid, in August 2016. This was approved in December 2016, and maximum funding, of a total of £5m was awarded to the Council to implement the regeneration plans for the park.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Sustainable Development Select Committee is asked to :
- Note the content of the report

4. Policy context

- 4.1 Lewisham's long standing vision is: 'Together, we will make Lewisham the best place in London to live, work and learn'. This vision was developed following extensive consultation with Lewisham residents, public sector agencies, local business, voluntary and community sector organisations, and has been adopted by all our partners. It continues to be a bold ambition that stretches and motivates the Council and its partners to set priorities and deliver services in ways that achieve our vision.
- 4.2 The restoration of Beckenham Place Park could create a significant open space, venue and leisure facility that genuinely impacts the quality of life of thousands of residents. A park of this scale and history could make a substantial contribution to the regeneration of the south of borough, helping to engender a sense of place and pride in the area. This opportunity to transform Beckenham Place Park offers a key moment to make a further a step towards making Lewisham the best place in London to live, work and learn.
- 4.3 The key strategic document for Lewisham and our partners is the Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2020, "Shaping our Future". In this document, the strategic partners set out six priorities – creating communities that are:
- Ambitious and achieving
 - Safer
 - Empowered and responsible
 - Clean, green and liveable
 - Healthy, active and enjoyable
 - Dynamic and prosperous
- 4.4 A large and thriving open space can make a contribution to local communities in each and every priority area above. Yet Beckenham Place Park is not yet having this positive impact on the locality. The Heritage Lottery Funds made available to the Council for the regeneration of the park, offer the opportunity to harness the potential of the park for the benefit of the local community.

4.5 Already we are beginning to witness an increase in use of the park as people enjoy the parkland that was previously perceived to be out of bounds to non golfers.

5. The park and the vision for regeneration

5.1 Beckenham Place Park is Lewisham's largest park by far; indeed it is the one of the largest parks in London, and South east London's biggest open space. At 95 hectares it is 30% bigger than Greenwich Park. It boasts ancient woodland, meadow, parkland, a river and several historic buildings. It was originally acquired by the London County Council to be the key amenity space for the new estates of Bellingham and Downham.

5.2 Yet today the park is little known among the wider community and is used significantly less than many other Lewisham parks, despite its size. A usage and movement survey of the park was carried out by Building Design Partnership (BDP) in 2013. In addition, in November 2015 and April 2016 a further usage survey was carried out. Together these surveys establish a fairly robust picture of usage throughout the year. They conclude that the park currently attracts around 220,000 visits a year, which is only around a quarter of the number of visits made to Brockwell Park.

5.3 At the heart of the vision to regenerate Beckenham Place Park and its buildings is the aspiration to significantly increase the use of the park. Specifically, the project team sets out to triple use of the park by 2022. Primarily it is local people who will use the park, so re-connecting the communities of Bellingham, Downham, Whitefoot and Catford with the park, as well as welcoming visitors from Beckenham and Bromley, is key to achieving this aim.

5.4 Engaging a much broader and larger audience to benefit from the park, it is important to recognise the breadth of appeal and opportunities it affords. In order to ensure the regeneration plans build on the full breadth of the parks potential, five themes have been developed:

Themes for the park's regeneration:

- Community
- Heritage
- Outdoor activity
- Nature
- Relaxation and play

5.4.1 Community

Following the restoration the park will become a hub for community life. The derelict gardener's cottage will become a volunteering hub, from which a diverse volunteering programme will be run. The community garden will offer opportunities for many to get involved in growing in the park – groups such as Sydenham Gardens, and Guides and Scouts have already expressed an interest in using this resource. Early opportunities for involvement such as the recent tree planting have also attracted over a hundred volunteers with no affiliation to organised groups.

In addition to volunteering, a programme of events will be run, delivered partly through the HLF programme and the community engagement officer (to be appointed as part of the project), but largely through partnerships the team is already building with other organisations who are keen to use the space for their community activities – activities as diverse as forest school, immersive theatre, geocaching, and outdoor cinema. Markets will be held in the park periodically, and art exhibitions could be held in the gardens or mansion. We are currently working with Phoenix's Young Makers Agency to plan an event around the opening of the BMX track and establish the park as a key space for young people in the area too.

The regeneration programme will make Beckenham Place Park into a place where community gathers – where people from all walks of life and all ages come together to volunteer, to learn, to celebrate, to enjoy events and the great outdoors, together.

5.4.2 Heritage

Beckenham Place Park is a place full of history. Its listed buildings are much loved by local people, and the regeneration of the park aims to bring alive the stories of the park and its buildings to all park users. As the mansion is the dominant building in the park, built by John Cator in the late eighteenth century, the regeneration looks particularly to restore the eighteenth century landscape of the Cator estate, for twenty-first century use. The restoration of the lake and pleasure grounds, and the relocation of the current car park away from the mansion's curtilage and restoration of the carriageway drive will redefine the park's landscape as an attractive setting in line with the principles favoured by Historic England and the council's conservation officers.

The restoration of the eighteenth century stable block and stable yard, damaged by fire in 2011, will create a historic and beautiful arrival point and hub for the park. Once restored, the stable block will provide a café, toilets and an education centre and most visitors who arrive at the park by car will begin their visit here.

Through the regeneration of the park, many key heritage features will be restored, and the history of the park will be brought to life through landscape and interpretation.

5.4.3 Outdoor activity

As south east London's largest park, Beckenham Place Park offers many opportunities for outdoor activities that other urban parks simply cannot support. Already ParkRun is established on the eastern side of the park with around 170 runners each week. Once the restoration is complete, ParkRun, and other runners throughout the week, will be able to make use of the 5km figure of 8 path, allowing people to walk, run or cycle 5km without leaving the park or repeating any section of path.

In addition to this path, which will also serve as a family cycling trail, the project team are exploring the possibility of including some additional mountain-biking elements off the main path. A BMX facility is being built, and the skatepark enhanced. A trim trail will be provided in the woods, as well as opportunities for orienteering and geocaching.

New paths are being created within the parkland to encourage people to explore and enjoy the extent of the open space, and to venture from the one side of the railway line to the other. And the park will also be home to more adventurous activities with kayaking and swimming offered in the lake. The park will provide many and varied opportunities for outdoor activities – many of which are not offered in other parks locally.

5.4.4 Nature

Beckenham Place Park is Lewisham's most important site for nature conservation. With its varied habitats of ancient woodland, acid grassland, river and meadow, the site already supports considerable biodiversity. Through the regeneration we will introduce new habitats identified as priorities within Greater London – open water and wet woodland. The project has already planted 2.8 hectares of new woodland following award of funding from the Mayor of London, and is seeking to expand areas of meadow and improve the management of existing woodlands, removing invasive species and holly which shades out the native ground flora.

The regeneration of the park will also help people to engage with and to appreciate the wealth of nature in Beckenham Place park, through new trails, interpretation, education, events and through the accessibility of the landscape itself. Many people commented in consultation events that they appreciate Beckenham Place Park as a 'piece of countryside'. This sense of openness and

reconnection with nature is an important aspect of the park, and the regeneration plans seek to strengthen this special character.

5.4.5 Relaxation and play

In a busy urban area it is important that communities have places to relax; where adults and children alike can 'play'. There will be significant new play provision within the park – small play areas in the pleasure grounds and by Old Bromley Road entrance, and a larger, more adventurous play area near the railway bridge on the eastern side of the park. But more importantly, there will be ample opportunities to explore, to discover, to relax, to 'breathe'. The provision of toilets and refreshment facilities on both sides of the park is key to fulfilling this aim. Beckenham Place Park will become a place where people like to linger, a place all sorts of people come to love.

Please refer to Appendix 1, a masterplan of the park.

6. The flood alleviation scheme

- 6.1 Currently an area stretching from St Dunstan's playing fields (the old Powerleague) up to Deptford Bridge DLR is at substantial risk of flooding from the River Ravensbourne, which flows through Beckenham Place Park. To address this, we have been working with the Environment Agency to progress the River Ravensbourne Flood Alleviation scheme, which will use the eastern side of Beckenham Place Park as a key area to store water in high flow conditions.
- 6.2 The project team for the park's regeneration are working closely with the Environment Agency to ensure the flood storage scheme works as part of the park's regeneration, and that the community benefit, not only in terms of reduced flood risk, but also in terms of a greatly enhanced park once the scheme is completed.
- 6.4 The flood alleviation scheme involves interventions at 10 sites along the River Ravensbourne, but affects Beckenham Place Park on the eastern side of the railway only. The flood scheme presents a great opportunity to synchronise the two projects (flood alleviation and park regeneration) together for cost effectiveness and to create a holistic vision for the park.

7. Project timetable and transformation to date

- 7.1 Since the approval of the Round 2 bid, the project has been awaiting planning approval. Currently the project manager is tendering for designers (heritage

architects and landscape architects) and detailed design works should commence in May. It is expected the project will then progress as follows:

BMX track opens	July 2017
Planning application submitted for flood scheme and eastern side of park	August 2017
Tender for works contracts	October 2017 – Dec 2017
Contracts awarded, mobilisation	Jan - Feb 2018
Preliminary works	Feb 2018
Works contracts begin	March 2018
Works completed on site	June 2019
HLF activity grant ceases	June 2022

7.2 Although the physical transformation of the park is still to come, since the closure of the golf course the park, its audiences and activities have begun to change:

- ParkRun established with 170 runners each week
- 4 Forest school events have been held in the park
- More schools work has taken place, with tree planting and a weekly session with Coninsborough college
- Ground staff report a busier winter in terms of park usage
- Community and school runs booked in the park
- Cyclocross event held in the park
- Successful Christmas event held in the park attracting over 1000 visitors
- Three volunteer tree planting events held, attracting 100 volunteers planting 1500 trees.
- 11,000 trees planted in the park, funded by the GLA, creating 2.8 hectares of new woodland

7.3 The project team are regularly approached by new people who are seeking to get involved in the park or run activities there. In order to ensure these opportunities to engage new audiences are pursued, a community engagement officer will be recruited shortly.

7.4 It is exciting to see the level of interest in the park from local people. These community led activities, diversifying the audiences and opportunities in the park, are as much part of the regeneration as the physical transformation is.

8. Buildings within the park

- 8.1 The Parks for People transformation of the park will deliver the restoration of several key listed buildings in the park:
- The Grade II listed eighteenth century stable block will become a café and education centre
 - Southend Lodge and Gate house (Grade II listed) will be restored externally to create a welcoming and historic entrance to the park from Beckenham Hill Road
 - The Victorian gardener's cottage will be fully restored to become a volunteer hub for the park

In addition, a simple new building to provide refreshments and toilets will be built on the eastern side of the park, near the Old Bromley Road entrance.

- 8.2 The mansion, the Foxgrove and the homestead cottages sit outside of the scope of the Parks for People funded regeneration of the park. (Please see appendix 2 for photographs and locations) The current use of these buildings is as follows:

Mansion: Following cessation of golf operations RJK Properties took on a 22 month lease for the mansion on 1st November 2016. Their occupation safeguards a vulnerable building and creates opportunities to grow activity in the park whilst restoration works get underway. They have carried out repairs and undertaken important maintenance such that the building is now in a better condition and less likely to deteriorate. They have reopened a café which was one of the elements that closed along with the golf course ensuring that there is continuity of provision in the interim period during restoration. They also provide security to the park by having a presence in the mansion throughout the day and night, and have sublet rooms as artist studios, for sewing/craft community sessions, and to a pilates/wellbeing centre as well as supporting the continuation of the Friends of Beckenham Place Park visitor centre in the building.

RJK properties led the Christmas event 'Festival of Lights', are planning a community open day at the mansion on 29th April, and are working with the Council to support a short series of free summer events in the park to engage new audiences.

Funds required for full restoration of mansion: c.£3-4m

Foxgrove Club: Property guardians currently inhabit the Foxgrove Club

Funds required for full restoration: c.£250k

Considerably less investment is required to make the building usable for various different purposes

Homestead cottages: Originally estate workshops built in the early Victorian era, these were converted into workers' cottages by London County Council in the 1930's. They are currently derelict and in need of considerable restoration. They form one side of the courtyard which is being restored and are a priority for restoration to form an attractive visitor hub.

Funds required for full restoration c.£300k

8.3 Developing a strategy for these three buildings within the open space is a key part of the regeneration of Beckenham Place Park.

In the long term it is important that these buildings

- Complement the park and its activities
- Return rental revenues to the Council that can help sustain the management and maintenance of the park in the long term
- Draw new audiences to the park and add to the visitor experience of the park.

Given the restoration funds required for each of these buildings, it is likely (unless the Council was to fund the restoration prior to letting), that leases on the buildings would need to be long term commitments from both parties.

8.4 The 'Call for Ideas' issued in July 2016 asked people, organisations and investors to share ideas for any or all of these buildings. The limited response demonstrated that most potential investors/tenants found it difficult to imagine the park as we believe it will be, post regeneration, and as a result, underestimated the potential of the buildings and the opportunities they present. Rather than responding to a future vision, people responded to the opportunity they saw at the time, with a space that has very low visitor numbers.

8.5 Given the scale of change anticipated in the park over the next five years – in terms of its facilities, landscape, and most importantly its visitor numbers – it does not seem prudent to the project team to enter into long term leases on the properties at this stage. Guidance from HLF Trustees as part of a formal review of our proposals was that it would be more advantageous to the Council, and better for the park in the long term, to allow the regeneration of the park to unfold, and the audiences to increase and diversify, in order that potential long

term tenants/investors can respond to the opportunities these buildings offer, post transformation of the park.

- 8.6 As a result the project team proposes letting both the Foxgrove and the mansion for the medium term. The Foxgrove could be marketed over summer 2017, with a view to securing a tenant to carry out necessary renovation works and return a rental income to the Council from autumn 2017. The tenancy would run for approximately 5 years, to 2022, allowing the physical transformation of the park to be properly embedded before re-marketing the opportunity for long term use.
- 8.7 The current lease on the mansion house expires in Sept 2018. At this stage, the project team recommends re-marketing the mansion house for a similar community facing let, looking to secure a reasonable rental income and a tenant for a further 3-5 years from 2018. Towards the end of this period the Council would look to secure a long term partner, with whom to bid for HLF restoration funds, to fully restore the building and establish a long term use that fits with the park, its audiences recognises the mansion's importance as one of the borough's few historic civic buildings.
- 8.8 This process would also enable the Council to respond to any emerging needs within the park from new audiences that have not as yet been anticipated.
- 8.9 Whilst the project team believes this approach would work well for the mansion and the Foxgrove, it will not be appropriate for the homestead cottages. The cottages are situated on the northern side of the stable yard, which will become a key visitor hub post regeneration. Currently the cottages are derelict, and they require substantial investment to become usable. In order to ensure the visitor experience is as pleasant as possible, to encourage repeat visits and drive up usage of the park, it is important that the stable yard is an attractive place, in which people want to linger.
- 8.10 Because of their sensitive location, therefore, together with their current state of dereliction, restoring the cottages, and securing a complementary use which will add to the park's offer is a key part of regenerating the park, and should be undertaken at the same time as the regeneration of the park.
- 8.11 The project team will therefore recommend that the Council's capital programme provides £300k from the capital programme to enable the restoration to take place, and then seeks to secure tenant(s) who will pay rent to the Council and complement the park and its facilities. It would be prudent to enter into a lease for a relatively short term (perhaps up to 7 years) and to ensure rents are reviewed each year to enable the rental return to increase as

visitor numbers increase and the scale of the commercial opportunity also increases.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Substantial progress has been made to raise funds and establish a blueprint for the park's restoration and use, but the scale of the project is very substantial. Whilst residents can look forward to the initial phase of work completing in June 2019 with many new facilities, it likely to be several more years before all aspects of the project are completed.

10. Background documents and report author

- 10.1 Alison Taylor - Project Manager x48758

Appendices:

- Current masterplan – emerging landscape design for the park

If you require any further information about this report please contact Alison Taylor on alison.taylor@lewisham.gov.uk

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Location plan



The homesteads



The Mansion House



The Foxgrove Club

