

Q&A on proposal for an Upper Woods nature area in Waterlow Park

Various questions have been raised during the consultation which has just closed. The following Q&A draws many of them together. The consultation was both to gauge public opinion and seek additional ideas. Some questions will only be fully answered as the proposal is reviewed in the light of the consultation.

Q: Is there any current plan to enter into an agreement with any commercial groups in relation to regular use of the Pond Nature area or the proposed new area?

A: There are no current plans to take bookings for sole use of either area. The proposal set out in the consultation was:

“1) Making a section of the Upper Woods more welcoming to park users by addition of log seating. This can be used like an outdoor class room for group instruction or used by individuals, friends and families to spend some time observing nature.”

There is no current agreement with any commercial groups in relation to regular paid use of the Upper Pond nature area or the proposed new area. Previously there have been bookings taken for outdoor learning/forest groups for the Upper Pond area on a non-sole-use basis as the site isn't locked, and groups had to sign up to the Camden code of conduct. Currently no charges are levied by Camden for Forest School bookings but the model for outdoor learning is being reviewed. This is a long term piece of work, and internal and external engagement will be carried out. Currently Forest School bookings are on hold at Waterlow Park, as the upper pond area is closed for habitat improvement works, and no decision has been made on re-opening either area to forest schools. Such a decision would be subject to consultation with the Friends of Waterlow Park (FoWP) and review by the Trust Advisory Group (TAG).

In the wider park where there is a proposal for an event, party, filming or exercise bootcamp the Camden events team manages these via '[Hold an event in a park - Camden Council](#)'. Any charge is proportionate to the scale and impact of any event/activity.

Q: Will any group be allowed sole use of the Upper Woods area for any period of time if the project under consultation were to proceed?

A: No sole use of the area is intended or proposed by FoWP, and sole use of this area is not supported by Camden Council or TAG.

Q: How is it that a Forest School appears to have gained the impression that the Upper Woods were available for its use?

A: A forest school along with other groups, were previous users of the Upper Pond Nature Area, and were informed when this area was closed to them. FoWP were asked about other potential areas of the park that could be used by different groups as Camden were receiving enquiries. When looking at possible areas for nature discovery forest schools were understood to represent a potential use. In selecting a suitable area for nature discovery which might be suitable for as many potential user scenarios as possible there was consultation with different parties including a forest school. No undertakings were given at any time about continued use of any area in Waterlow Park by forest schools. Any contrary assumptions are regrettable and were incorrect. A website pre-advertising the site under consultation as the location of a forest school was brought to the attention of Camden and subsequently taken down as it was unauthorised.

Q: There appears to be some urgency to the consultation and to reaching a decision. Why?

A: There is no urgency, the consultation is to understand views before a recommendation would be made to TAG.

Q: Encouraging public use of a new nature discovery area seems incompatible with enhancing biodiversity. How can this be reconciled?

A: The proposal under consultation is concerned to encourage public use. However, encouraging significant use is not intended, assuming 'significant' to mean an intensity of use which leaves the area in a worse state than it is at present. The proposal aims to improve the area for nature education and access to nature for people, and improving the biodiversity goes hand in hand with this. The area is not currently proactively managed for biodiversity and is degraded. It is recognised that use by people will limit the biodiversity increases that could otherwise be achieved, however it is believed the management improvements could increase the biodiversity in this area despite this. The area will need monitoring to see what impact changing use has. How it is managed may need adjusting depending on how such use evolves.

Q: Enclosure is problematic as it suggests people may be unwelcome even if the area is not 'out of bounds'. If the proposal were to go ahead how is this to be addressed?

Informal use is to be encouraged as well as occasional educational groups. The area is roughly triangular. Enclosure will not change the appearance of the area from one side due to existing dense hedging apart from a discreet gate in an existing gap. From the main path down from the High Street there are bushes and new planting will fill in gaps. Remaining gaps can be largely 'disguised' rather than fenced. The third side is beside an overshadowed path with steps at one end running towards the tennis courts from the direction of the High Street gate. Here it is currently proposed that there be 'dead-hedging' with a gate which should retain a natural appearance and gradually provide a greener, irregular and more natural look. Planting along this side of normal hedging would be ineffective due to the shade. Entrance points (proposed to be wood gates) will have notices inviting people in to the area to explore. Consultation responses and ideas will be taken into account in this as in other areas.

Q: The consultation states that dogs are to be kept out. Is this really necessary?

A: The proposals aim to improve biodiversity principally through management. However, dogs, even when on leads, can negatively affect breeding bird success, and dog faeces also has a negative effect on biodiversity. Although a few years old now, [THIS DOCUMENT](#) provides a useful summary and [THIS RECENT STUDY](#) looked at the issue of fouling.

Q: There seems to be a fixed, 'all at once' implementation plan in the consultation. Why not introduce change gradually in a more progressive way, adapting if appropriate?

A: The consultation is on a proposal agreed by the Biodiversity Group. Now the consultation is closed we can take responses into account and review what happens next. This may well include revisions to the implementation approach proposed.

Q: Could this project not be taken forward in tandem with the biodiversity survey the public are being encouraged to engage with? Would that not lead to the most appropriate changes?

A: The proposal on which consultation is taking place arose from the Friends Group and was considered and later supported to be taken forward by the Trust Advisory Group who referred it to Camden Green Spaces. Camden are happy for the nature area project to be taken forward in tandem with Wildlife surveys being undertaken in the park.

Q&A approved by: The Friends of Waterlow Park / Camden Green Spaces 25th Feb 2022