

14 November 2017		ITEM: 7
Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Coalhouse Fort Conservation Management Plan		
Wards and communities affected: East Tilbury		Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Matthew Brown, Regeneration Programme Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Andy Millard, Assistant Director of Planning and Growth		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Coalhouse Fort and Park in East Tilbury is a key heritage and environmental asset in the east of the Borough. The 1860's built Fort is currently in a very poor physical condition; however the Council has plans for its restoration and development as a key heritage and cultural destination, and local community resource.

In March 2016 the Council as the owner of the site was awarded funding from Historic England, focussing initially on surveying the Fort to establish its detailed condition, designing a prioritised programme of emergency repairs as a first step towards halting the buildings deterioration, and then undertaking business planning and commercial feasibility analysis with a view to establishing a range of new income generating uses sympathetic to its historical significance. These, together with further external funding and investment to be attracted, will enable ongoing restorations and repairs on a phased and planned basis; ultimately ensuring the Fort's sustainability and realising its potential.

As part of the initial surveying phase a Conservation Management Plan was developed for the Fort. This is presented in three volumes which 1) set out the historic significance of the Fort; 2) describe in detail the spaces in the Fort and their original uses, and; 3) set out the risks, opportunities, vision and policy drivers that apply to its conservation and further development.

This report reviews the progress that has already been made in developing and consulting on the Conservation Management Plan, and sets out the actions that will follow once the Conservation Management Plan has been adopted by the Council.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the suite of policies and principles in the Conservation Management Plan for Coalhouse Fort presented at 3.1 in this report.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In 1962 the Ministry of Defence decommissioned Coalhouse Fort and it was handed to the council on a 1000-year leasehold. From the early 1980's a local charity; The Coalhouse Fort Project was established to run activities at the site including open days and tours, and undertake repairs and restorations to the building, under a lease from the Council.
- 2.2 In 2013 the Council secured funding from Heritage Lottery Fund and Veolia North Thames Trust which enabled the restoration of the Fort's generator block to provide a new café, toilets and information office. Interpretation in the Park and Fort was enhanced, and an education and events programme was established linking with the existing activities delivered by the Coalhouse Fort project.
- 2.3 Through developing the Heritage Lottery Fund programme, the Council strengthened its engagement with Historic England, who recognised the opportunity to access further funding to fully assess the building's condition and make emergency repairs, in recognition of the building's inclusion in Historic England's 'Buildings at Risk' register.
- 2.4 The historic significance of the Fort is extensive; the site being used for defence since the early 15th century when the first simple earthwork fortifications were built. These were replaced by the stone & brick blockhouse built in 1539 during the reign of Henry VIII and disarmed in 1553 before being demolished in the late 16th century. A small gun battery was built in 1799 close to where the current Fort is, with similar batteries constructed on the Kent side at Shornemead & the Lower Hope once again making East Tilbury the front line of Essex based Thames defences. The first Fort completed in 1855 was based on the site of the 1799 battery and effectively enclosed and enlarged it. Like the earlier defences this Fort was also short lived and the 1859 Royal Commission survey recommended a new Fort should be built.
- 2.5 The current Coalhouse Fort was built during between 1861 and 1874 and formed a key part of the Thames Defences, until the Second World War when it was developed further. The artillery was upgraded with new Anti-Aircraft gun batteries installed on the roof, a radar tower constructed, a degaussing station established and a minefield control building erected. Further anti-aircraft guns were erected at the adjacent Bowaters Farm.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Conservation Management Plan sets out a broad series of principles which will guide restorations, repairs, community engagement, and future uses of the Fort. In particular the following policies are to be noted. These form part of the suite of policies to be adopted by the Council (full details can be found in volume 3 of the Conservation Management Plan):
- CM2: All conservation works will be guided by an understanding of best conservation practice and philosophy.
 - CM3: All legislation and statutory designations under the various planning acts will be observed, and the necessary Scheduled Monument consents will be sought as appropriate. Future development at the site will be undertaken in accordance with the policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (NPPF).
 - MM2: The general condition of the site will be maintained to a high standard to reduce the need for substantial repairs in the future.
 - MM4: The ongoing management of the wider Coalhouse Fort Park will be undertaken to ensure that both the nature conservation values and heritage values of the place are protected.
 - DP1: Coalhouse Fort will be repaired, developed and refurbished to achieve its sustainable re-use, including the conservation of any affected heritage assets so their heritage value or significance can be enjoyed by current and future generations. Future possible uses will be carefully planned for and managed so that they do not degrade the significance of the site as set out in the Conservation Management Plan and by relevant authorities and expert advisors (such as Historic England, Natural England or others). Significance would be subject to revision in the light of new information or changes in condition.
 - DP2: All site development works at Coalhouse Fort, including the provision of visitor facilities, must be guided by the ability of the historic structures to sustain the changes, and must conform to a design appropriate to the fabric, aesthetics and significance of the site.
 - DP3: Where feasible and desirable, parts of the historic layout of the site should be considered for restoration to their original known configuration and form. Restoration needs to be carefully considered for its appropriateness in relation to the heritage values and significances of individual elements, and of site as a whole.
 - DP4: Opportunities to improve the setting and visibility of the Fort should be explored whenever possible. The legibility of the Fort buildings and spaces within them, the open character of the parade ground, and the wider parkland setting, should be preserved and enhanced.

- DP7: Any development at Coalhouse Fort should be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to the wider landscape and heritage, and should not negatively impact the significance of heritage assets in the surrounding area.
- AF1: The provision of facilities and level of access for visitors should be regularly reviewed, balanced against the need to prevent erosion to the site and its significance.
- AF3: Parking provision at the site will be reviewed, and every effort made to ensure that car parking has a minimal impact on the site and its significance.
- SS1: Thurrock Council will undertake or commission regular security reviews and will incorporate the results in the management of the site. The installation of safety measures will take into account the need to protect the physical and visual integrity and significance of the place, and non-intrusive methods should be explored before any physical installations, if deemed necessary, are considered.
- TE1: The interpretation plan for the site, drawing on a variety of media, will be regularly reviewed. This will seek to provide clear interpretation of the history and significance of the site, setting the Fort buildings and structures within the context of British history.
- TE3: The potential to increase the number of visitors to the site through promotion with partners and other heritage attractions will be explored.
- TE4: The site will provide educational materials and facilities, taking into account the requirements of the National Curriculum, and the unique opportunity the Fort presents for formal and informal education for local and visiting communities.
- ES1: The environmental impact of current and future activities will be assessed and monitored, and strategies devised to minimise and mitigate any environmental damage.

Longer-term planning and business development

- 3.2 As part of the Historic England funded programme, an income feasibility study has been developed, benchmarking other similar and relevant sites throughout the UK which have successfully achieved and implemented a range of commercial uses, sympathetic to their historic significance. This study is being developed further to include a financial options appraisal, which will guide further exploration including potentially significant changes of use.
- 3.3 The regeneration team and environment teams are implementing small-scale, practical income generating initiatives which can be launched independently of repairs and restorations, using the parts of the site which are already in a safe and usable condition. These could include simple venue hire, weddings, re-launch of the Fort's 'paranormal' programme, further events and education activities, and increased use of the Fort and park as a filming location. These

will fund small-scale works to maintain and manage the site, contribute to the cost of engaging volunteers, and help promote the site and its assets.

- 3.4 The relationship between the Council and the Coalhouse Fort Project is being formalised in a new Licence and Operating Agreement, which will provide the foundations for making best use of volunteers in historic conservation, and the broader range of uses of the site.
- 3.5 Further funding bids are being developed that will 'package' the site into a series of elements which can be progressed on a stand-alone basis, and are attractive to funders with benefits to communities, people and heritage conservation. The site is included in the Infrastructure Requirements List and will draw down developer contributions as part of the funding mix wherever possible, noting a number of emerging Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects in or adjacent to the East Tilbury ward.

The delivery of the actions in the Conservation Management Plan and the investment needed to deliver the broader commercialisation and sustainability of the site will thus be funded through a combination of further funding bids to Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic England and other funding bodies, supplemented by income generating uses of the Fort which will be launched as soon as practicable, underpinned by development of a new business strategy.

Proposed Approach:

- 3.6 It is proposed that the Council endorse and formally adopt the Conservation Management Plan outlined at 3.1. The plan and its policies will then form a key reference point to guide further enhancement at the site.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Conservation Management Plan has been developed through consultation and has been endorsed by Historic England. It delivers a good balance between preserving the historic fabric of the Fort, and enabling the development of new, income generating uses that will sustain its future.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with key stakeholders including the local community in East Tilbury, volunteers and third sector organisations engaged in current activities at the site, and Historic England. The ongoing and emerging programme outlined in this report would include further stakeholder engagement to guide development of the Conservation Management, and realising the opportunities offered by the site as these are developed.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides the main planning policy guidance governing any changes to the Fort including its conservation and development. Thurrock Local Development Framework (Core Strategy) includes policies for Sustainable Greenbelt and commits to their maintenance, increasing public access, leisure and biodiversity. The Core Strategy also identifies the promotion of heritage assets, including their fabric and their settings. The Fort plays a key role in the 'story' of Thurrock, its defences, and the role of the river Thames. It is crucial that any proposals for the Fort consider the impacts of developments such as Lower Thames Crossing, Port of Tilbury expansion and future housing growth, and wherever possible capitalise on the opportunities these may bring. The site is subject to a number of designations including Scheduled Monument Consent, SSSI, RAMSAR, Green Flag Award, and Flood Risk area.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Management Accountant

This report outlines the approach that will be taken in respect of undertaking further conservation management and sensitive development of Coalhouse Fort in East Tilbury. The cost of delivering ambitions for the Fort will be subject to further business planning including financial analysis. Wherever possible, external funding and income generation will be pursued as enablers to achieving the sustainability of the Fort. There are no financial implications implicit in the adoption of the Conservation Management plan itself.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Monitoring Officer

This report sets out the key current issues and opportunities affecting Coalhouse for in East Tilbury and the approach that will be taken to undertaking further conservation and development of this Fort. The arrangements with Coalhouse Fort Project are currently being reviewed and a new Licence to Occupy and Operating Agreement will be formalised shortly setting out how the charity and Council will work together. The legal implications of any proposals developed will be considered fully as they emerge, taking into account Scheduled Monument Consent and other formal designations applicable to the site.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development & Equalities
Manager**

Diversity and Equalities issues of all future uses of the Fort and Park will be addressed through a Community and Equality Impact Assessment informed and developed by appropriate Stakeholder Engagement. The Conservation Management Plan has been developed through engagement with the local community.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

Conservation Management Plan

Report Author:

Matthew Brown
Regeneration Programme Manager
Regeneration