

RESPONSE TO EEPAC COMMENTS ON P&R PLAN

Responses below are linked to the page number of the 2009 P&R Plan attached to EEPAC's July 19/18 Agenda

Page iv

The comment suggests that the whole “natural heritage system” (not just ESAs) be excluded from the Plan.

The City's full natural heritage system includes Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs). Currently, there are 12 large ESAs that the City contracts the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority to manage. While ESAs provide Londoners with great opportunities for recreational hiking, these areas have their own planning and management goals and processes that fall outside of the mandate of the Parks & Recreation Master Plan. The planning and management of ESAs resides with our City Planning service area.

From the discussion at EEPAC, it was agreed that much of the NHS overlaps with the parks system in many places, the largest being the Thames Valley corridor. The two branches of the Thames River run through the City, including many of our largest parks – Springbank, Gibbons, Harris, Greenway, North London Athletic Fields, St. Julien and Thames Parks. Through the development of the Thames Valley Corridor Plan, Londoners established a guiding vision for the corridor that is now part of the new London Plan:

The Thames Corridor is London's most important natural, cultural, recreational and aesthetic resource. The City and community partners will preserve and enhance the natural environment, Thames River health, vistas, beauty and cultural heritage while accommodating compatible infrastructure, accessibility and recreation.

It is understood that the Corridor will provide all of these benefits to Londoners. The same would apply to the major creek corridors – many of which have manicured parks, pathways, trails and infrastructure through them. New opportunities for pathways/trails and/or naturalization would balance these goals.

London's parks and open space system – with many assets connected to the Thames River – has consistently been rated by the public as one of the city's best features. Parks and open spaces enhance the vibrancy of our communities and keep individuals connected and engaged. Their impact on personal wellness is significant, including the many mental health and healing benefits associated with connections to nature. There has been more research specifically into the benefits of nature for children and major efforts to provide opportunities in urban areas for all residents to interact with nature. These benefits are well documented and are recognized by Londoners, as they rank “hiking on nature trails” as their second most popular recreational activity, after “walking for leisure”. Cycling was number 3. It is therefore a high priority to continue to provide residents with these valuable experiences. As more Londoners value and appreciate nature, they are more likely to support and advocate for the protection and management of our natural areas. This approach is consistent with London's Official Plan policies.

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This is not a primary benefit of sustainable environments. And do you mean “natural environments”?

The City does value ecological benefits of the environment, even if this is secondary to the intrinsic benefits of an overall healthy environment.

Page viii

The comments suggests that addressing major gaps in the TVP “has been used to threaten the integrity of the natural heritage system.”

These gaps are critical to fill and are done in keeping with the vision of the Thames Valley Corridor Plan – multiple objectives to be met (as above). Full EAs are done to develop the best solution in keeping with policies and regulations regarding significant natural features. With the completion of the pathway, many ecological enhancements are being carried out as well.

As noted previously, the TVP can be compatible with much of the natural heritage system.

Page 3

The comment says “the Corridor Plan is more about recreation than preservation”.

The Corridor Plan balances all goals, as per the community developed vision:

The Thames Corridor is London’s most important natural, cultural, recreational and aesthetic resource. The City and community partners will preserve and enhance the natural environment, Thames River health, vistas, beauty and cultural heritage while accommodating compatible infrastructure, accessibility and recreation.

The first two of ten objectives of the Plan are about establishing a suitably sized corridor connected to its tributary watersheds and to preserve and enhance natural heritage features. Only one objective is specifically about recreation.

1. Establish a continuous corridor with a minimum width and identify linkages to tributary sub-watersheds.
2. Preserve and enhance natural heritage features including vegetation, wildlife habitat, water quality, improved erosion control (storm/sewage impacts).
3. Preserve and enhance cultural heritage through educational signage, building preservation and identification of historical significance.
4. Develop guidelines and policies to ensure development along the corridor is compatible with the goals and objectives of the Plan.
5. Preserve and enhance the aesthetic beauty of the corridor.
6. Determine what infrastructure is compatible for inclusion in the corridor (such as utilities and buildings).
7. Determine and map compatible recreation uses. Identify suitable points of access, pathway and trail systems, lookout points and linkages to communities and Thames Valley Parkway.
8. Engage citizens in plans for the corridor through education, sharing of information and consultation. Create signage and promote stewardship and riverside clean-ups.
9. Determine what measures are necessary to ensure safe use of the Thames Valley Corridor (such as safe trails and access points).
10. Determine appropriate policies, regulations and enforcement through integration with the

Official Plan.

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If including references to the NHS, include a clear guiding principle.

We will be including much of the NHS within the scope of the Plan, as it provides huge recreational benefits to all Londoners, such as connecting Londoners to nature, as well as providing intrinsic environmental benefits that benefit the City. As per the comments above.

Page 22

Pathways and trails with amenities like drinking fountains, washrooms and benches conflict with protecting the NHS.

The Plan bullet point spoke to “passive recreational use of pathways and trails”. But if not designed properly, we’d agree. There are many locations where a bench is a perfect addition to a trail system within the NHS. We do not support a washroom or fountain in ecologically sensitive areas of the NHS.

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Pathways and trails can be in conflict with protecting the NHS. How will you develop priorities?

Yes, they could be, if not designed properly. Trails and pathways are the number 1, 2 and 3 used/desired amenities in the parks and open space system, so we will continue to provide them and design them correctly so as to not conflict with protecting significant features of the NHS.

The survey of Londoners identifies their top 3 desirable recreational activities: Walking for leisure / hiking in a natural area / cycling. London’s pathway and trails are a high priority for continued development.

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Need to add a definition of “passive recreation”

We could do that. It is not organized sports activities such as baseball / soccer / cricket / hockey or traditional play areas. It generally is pathways and trails. Perhaps we can use the UTRCA’s recent policy and definition for this.

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The City is not obligated to follow the advice of the ACCAC, or any Committee.

Correct. We are obligated to consult with ACCAC as experts in accessibility. They provide advice to Council, who may or may not take that advice. There are potential risks regarding Human Rights infractions with not following their advice.

Page 36

There has been no public process for the development of a guideline for the use of Significant Woodlands – need to make that a recommendation.

The City has a team that manages woodlands, led by the Urban Forestry Area. The determination of, and the management of Significant Woodlands includes cultural/recreational uses under the PPS/Natural Resources Reference Manual – Section 7.3.1. Through a woodland management plan, uses are established that are compatible with the long-term integrity of the woodland.

The TVCP was not a stewardship document. By including the NHS, you are overlaying recreation over protection and enhancement.

See response to comments on page 3. Multiple objectives are to be met along the Thames Corridor and ecological protection / restoration / stewardship are main objectives. As is recreation.

Page 55

Yes, the Bicycle Master Plan avoids ESAs. And identifies preferred routes for future pathways that may be in or cross the NHS and generally require further study.

Page 56

“Park resource plans” for ecological features are being done – woodland management plans, for example. Including this in the P & R Plan is appropriate, as those plans can and do include public recreational use.

Page 57

Regional pathway and trail plans are being coordinated with adjacent municipalities. And yes, outside of ESAs. Where ecologically supported and appropriate, pathways and trails may be in the natural heritage system – as discussed in comments for Page iv.

Stewardship priorities have been pretty well set – ESAs at the top and with the new Invasive Species Management Strategy, we are looking at wetlands and woodlands next.

Yes, more should be done on the “awareness” side.

Page 58

Off-leash pets are still an issue. There has been an increase in the UTRCA’s efforts to control dogs off leash in ESAs, and specific “blitzes”. But the issue remains across the City. We have added 2 new dog off leash parks as well. All parks have signs about keeping dogs on leash. More enforcement is required.

Yes, we will be more specific to “open space” or NHS.

Pathway and trail connections are key for active living. And yes, pathways are outside of ESAs. Where ecologically supported and appropriate, pathways and trails may be in the natural heritage system – as discussed in comments for Page iv.

Yes, NHS and “parks” are different for the purposes of horticultural displays and urban spaces. This is referring to neighbourhood parks.

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The wording still is appropriate. As you noted, the Cycling Master Plan avoids ESAs. But also, the NHS overlaps the parks and open space system and there will be times that a pathway will be in the NHS - ie along the Thames River and Stoney Creek Valley.