

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee	2 May 2012	
Subject: Superintendent's Update Report	Public	
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Information	
<p><b><u>Summary</u></b></p> <p>This report provides an update to members of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee on management and operational activities in Highgate Wood over the last six months. The report describes progress on the new draft Conservation Management Plan, and matters pertaining to sustainability, staffing , conservation, infrastructure and the facilities.</p> <p><b>Recommendations</b></p> <p>That the views of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee be received.</p>		

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. Highgate Wood has experienced another period of progress in a number of areas, including the production of the first draft of the new Conservation Management Plan, which will be accompanying this report. Work has commenced on an exciting new project to install a series of solar panels on the tractor shed, and the team are now well prepared for the drought order with a series of rain water collection tanks. There has been excellent progress over the winter period on woodland management and the tree inspection zoning procedure for the site has also been updated and improved. There is some less positive news to report on the tree sculpture in the play area, but a solution now has been identified to resolve this issue.

### **Sustainability and the Highgate Wood Improvement Plan**

2. Following on from the successful installation at Burnham Beeches, it was decided to explore the possibility of a photo voltaic system being installed on one of the buildings in the wood. After some discussion the tractor shed within the staff yard was identified as the most appropriate location due to its large surface area, considerably robust construction and good solar orientation. The panels would generate sufficient power to service all the requirements of the office and could also feed the excess back into the grid and generate a small income.

3. The Superintendent at Burnham Beeches was able to pass on the details of the contractor who carried out the installation on the office building there, and a site visit was arranged to view the suggested location in Highgate Wood and draw up a draft design and specification. These documents will now be passed on to a structural engineer to carry out a building survey and generate a report which can then be submitted with the contractor specification to Haringey's Planning Department to obtain planning consent. Informal enquiries have already been made to the Planning Department, and initial discussions suggest that solar energy application of this type are looked favourably upon and should receive planning permission.
4. The team have been very proactive in preparing for the recently introduced drought order. A series of 800 litre plastic rainwater containers are now installed in the staff yard connected to the rainwater guttering on the tractor shed. This will serve to provide water for the ornamental planting areas around the Pavilion Café and could also be used for cleaning machinery when necessary.
5. Plans are underway to improve the cost effectiveness of the existing waste management system in Highgate Wood. This work is combined with the launch of Hampstead Heath's Sustainability Improvement Plan a central part of which will be the diversion of the Heath's general waste stream away from Landfill. Rebecca Harrison is playing a central part in this project working closely with the Highgate Wood Manager, to identify the most effective sustainable disposal method for both sites, and at the same time examine the affordability of the various options available.
6. The existing general waste at Highgate Wood is taken to the Edmonton facility for incineration, but this is proving to be costly and there are now new alternatives to incineration which are being explored. The option that seems most attractive both environmentally and financially is a process which produces a material called Refuse Derived Fuel, or RDF for short. This material is used increasingly by the industrial sector as a bulk fuel and is produced by shredding and then drying general waste to improve combustability. It is used extensively in the European Union and is starting to find favour here in the UK especially as it a very competitive alternative to landfill in cost terms, and converts mixed general waste into a reusable commodity.
7. The intention is to tender for a new waste contractor this summer who can provide a collection service for both Highgate Wood and Hampstead Heath where general waste will be processed into RDF and landfill can be avoided completely.

## **Staffing and preparations for changes in 2014**

8. The financial year 2012/13 will be the last full year with the existing establishment of staff as from April 2013 one of the Woodkeeper's post will remain vacant to be covered for the 2013 Summer season by a temporary member of staff. From April 2014 onwards the team will operate with six member of staff comprised of four Woodkeepers and two Estate Workers.
9. The Management and the Highgate Wood Team will be starting the process of preparing for the restructure this autumn, but this summer will start the task of consulting with the two existing members of staff who's roles will need to be changed. This work will involve re-writing existing Job Descriptions and Person Specifications to include patrolling and locking up duties. There will be a need for additional training in order to assist the two team members to adapt to their new duties, and there will also be a requirement to modify the existing rosta system.
10. The five year work programme has now been converted into an electronic format and is in the process of being updated to include woodland management and tree inspections. This work programme commences this financial year (2012/13) and extends through for a five year period to 2017/18.

## **Heritage and History**

11. The Heritage Assessment has undergone some revisions and the second draft will be available for comment at the end of April. The Management team are very grateful to Michael Hammerson for providing additional time to edit the first draft with the Highgate Wood Manager. The history of the site covers an extensive period and could provide a lifetime's work for an archivist, but for the purposes of creating a concise but accurate document that can be read as an introduction to the Conservation Management Plan it is hoped the second draft should be sufficient.
12. The most significant change to the second draft is placing more focus on the fragmentation of the site following the construction of the Archway Road in the early nineteenth century, and the subsequent further destruction of woodland when the Alexandra Palace branch line was created. Although the site has remained relatively intact for the last 125 years, the period leading up to the Corporation of London's ownership was one of great disruption with an overall loss of close to 40 acres of the site's Ancient Woodland.

13. As part of the Conservation Management Plan process an architect was contracted to compile a series of options for the extension of the existing Education centre building to accommodate the Roman Kiln and interpretative material. These drawings have been included with the first draft of the Conservation Management Plan and could form the basis of an application for an external funding application.

### **Progress on the Conservation Management Plan**

14. The first draft of the plan is now completed and has been included with this report for the Committee's opinion. As with all documents that have been drafted by an external agency there has been a need to make a number of amendments to the text and also the maps that were included. These changes have been made and we hope that the version presented with this report will meet with the Committee's approval, although we recognise that further changes and amendments will almost certainly be necessary before the final version is made available for public circulation.
15. Clearly the key objective now is to ensure that the content of the Plan and text have fulfilled the original remit instructed by the management team, and that the draft document will be an effective and meaningful management tool. It is also very important that the Plan is seen by the Highgate Wood Team as a document that they can identify with and feel part of. There still remains some work to do on the visual aspect of the document; most importantly to include a number of good quality photos, within the text. The current set of maps included within the draft require refining to improve interpretation of the information.
16. The section concerning the Built Environment (section 7 on page 37) requires some additional updating following the current restructure changes within the City Surveyors Department, and there will be a need to include the relevant sections of the twenty year plan that involve planned long term maintenance of the buildings and infrastructure within the site.
17. The Vision and Policies in section 10 (page 55) will need to be carefully considered as these are the core components along with the Vision, of the management strategy for the site. The draft policies are derived from the Conservation Management Plan Workshop held in September last year, and would probably benefit from being structured in a more concise and shorter format; over two pages rather than five.
18. A date and suitable location is being considered for carrying out a public consultation on the Plan following any further amendments by the Committee. The most likely date for this will be the Heritage Day this coming autumn on the 4<sup>th</sup> September, as there will be a number of visitors and local residents visiting the event and arrangements can be made to set up an covered area where the plan can be viewed in a large display format

and participants can be invited to completed a questionnaire. The results of this survey can then be included in a report which can be submitted for the Committee's opinion in November.

## **Woodland and tree management**

19. The Wood Keeper team have managed to carry out a considerable amount of work over the winter months on individual trees and also on a number of the veteran status oak trees within the Conservation areas. In principle the surrounding smaller competing trees have been either pruned, coppiced or felled in order to reduce competition for light and nutrients. Cindy Blaney who has taken on the role of woodland management coordinator has carried out work in several of the older conservation area compartments including the 1997 area close to Onslow Gate, where areas of the regenerating hornbeam have been thinned in order to improve growing conditions for these especially important oaks.
20. Following considerable discussion over the winter a decision has been made on the site for the next Conservation area. This will be the eighth conservation area to be created and work will commence this autumn. Most of the previous sites have all been located at the southern end of the site and it was felt that there was a need to create the 2012 area at a suitable location in the part of Wood north of the memorial fountain. The team looked at various locations during the winter and finally identified an area which also includes a section of the large earthwork structure. Michael Hammerson who provides advice on archaeological and heritage matters was invited to inspect the area and gave his approval with some conditions. The work will combine extensive holly coppicing, with some selective hornbeam cutting and the fencing that will be installed around the area will serve as additional protection for this vulnerable section of the earthwork structure.
21. The team have been working mostly on those trees located within the red zone, that is trees identified as high risk and requiring annual inspections due to their proximity to busy pathways, roads, buildings or other facilities. In order to fulfil tree safety requirements on site, an external Tree Inspector was contracted to carry out condition surveys over a number of days in March and plot and inspect the majority of the medium risk zone trees. This has enabled the Wood Keeper who coordinates tree inspections to concentrate on priority works and also update the current risk zoning process.
22. The oak decline survey work will resume in June, and it will be interesting to note whether there has been any further decline in the trees that were causing some concern last summer. We will also be exchanging information with Queen's Wood own survey group who carried out their own assessment last year. This will be the third year of surveying and the additional data collected this summer should enable the survey team to

produce a more detailed analysis, and determine whether the decline appears to be increasing across the sample population or remaining stable. This analysis will be discussed in the November update report, that will be circulated to the Committee later this year.

### **Infrastructure and Buildings**

23. In the previous report from November 2011, there was concern expressed over the worsening condition of the perimeter fencing along the Muswell Hill Road. City Surveyors had scheduled this work to be carried out after Christmas this year but due to difficulties with ordering the materials the work has been delayed but assurance has been given that the work will be carried out this month (April). These works will be replacing just over 200 metres of the old fencing, and will focus on the area around the Onslow Gate entrance southwards, greatly improve the security of the site and resolve some of the safety concerns about the existing fencing.
24. Sadly the Pavilion Café was the target of another burglary in early February with the culprits breaking into the building through the kitchen area and stealing the contents of the till. Although the amount of money stolen was of little consequence the level of damage to the building, CCTV and security system was considerable and the present manager is in discussion with City Surveyors to install a series of security shutters around the building to protect the access points. It is hoped that the increased security measures, which will include improved security lighting and CCTV will prevent further incidents.

### **Play area and recreation**

25. The tree sculpture that attracted considerable attention back in March 2009 has recently been the centre of the team's attention as there are some concerns about the structural integrity of the basal area of the tree. The tree has been colonised by a fungal species that can cause significant degradation of the heart wood of the tree. The team were aware of this condition at the time of the creation of the sculpture and it was always realised that the structure would have a finite life span and would require close monitoring.
26. The Hampstead Heath Tree Team have recently purchased a specialist tree detection device which enables the wood structure profile to be accurately assessed using a micro drill. The base of the sculpture was drilled at various locations and the readings do indicate a progression of the decay within the buttress structures. However this decay is currently contained within the sap wood of the root crown and buttress structures, and is not as extensive as first feared. Due to the location of the feature and in the interests of safety it has been decided to partially dismantle the upper part of the sculpture to reduce the top loading. This operation will be carried out

within the next two months using specialist lifting equipment and locate the removed sections to an appropriate area still within the play area. The root crown will continue to be carefully monitored and it is hoped that the main part of the feature can be retained for another year or two.

27. The southern edge of the field is the subject of a new wild flower meadow project which will introduce a new habitat to the amenity grassland and it is hoped will encourage a diversity of insects to explore the area. The area has been sowed with a cornflower annual mix which we hope will germinate over the coming months and provide a colourful display throughout June and July this year.



**Figure 1: Wild flower meadow site on sports field edge.**

## **Community and Events**

28. Over the period between April 2011 to March 2012 the Highgate Wood team provided a total of 2,148 person hours for a variety of community based activities. The largest component of this work was centred around the sports field and connected with the preparation and maintenance of the pitches which totalled 1,723 hours. The largest contribution after sports related works was the walk talks which totalled 150 hours. Community continues to be a central part of the team's work and it is vitally important to maintain this service as it is widely appreciated but perhaps not

publicised enough. This is an area that will be explored in more detail during the public consultation for the new Conservation Management Plan.

29. Several members of the Highgate Wood team and the Ecologist have been continuing their work assisting the Friends of Coldfall Wood with advice on the management of the woodland and conservation matters. A site visit was held in December 2011 to discuss progress on small scale works that the Friends group have carried out within the site. The Ancient Woodland site has recently been the recipient of funds from the Big Lottery Fund's Community Spaces programme, totally just under £50,000 and this money will go towards a much needed programme of work to improve the stream line and the reed bed area at the southern end of the site. The City of London team will be returning this summer to review the on-going work and look forward to seeing the improvements.
30. Exploratory discussions have been taking place between the London Borough of Haringey and the Highgate Wood Management team over the possible designation of Highgate Wood as a Local Nature Reserve. Haringey's Conservation Officer has been very successful in lobbying to include a number of the boroughs Ancient Woodland sites as Local Nature Reserves, including the neighbouring Queens Wood. The designation would be an appropriate accolade for the site, and reinforce the link with the other woodland sites within the Hornsey area. The process would be relatively straight forward involving discussions with Natural England, and entering into an agreement with London Borough of Haringey, who would be the designating authority.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

31. The proposal contributes to producing a Clean, Pleasant and Attractive City (Objective CPAC4) and to Conserve and Protect Biodiversity (Goal 15) in the Community Strategy. It will help fulfil the Department's Strategic Goals and Objectives 2 (To adopt sustainable and sensitive working practices, promote biodiversity and protect the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations) and 5 (To ensure that the profile of the Open Spaces is further recognised through working in partnership with others to promote our sites and through influencing policies at a local, regional and national level).

### **Implications**

32. There are no financial implications arising from this report, the operational requirements highlighted in the report will be met from the Superintendents' local risk budget.

### **Conclusion**



33. Highgate Wood continues to be a popular open space in north London, the staff are actively engaged in a number of initiatives to ensure that the management of the site is sustainable and operates within the financial limits set down by the City Corporation.

## **Appendices**

Draft version of Conservation Management Plan for Highgate Wood

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