

Communications Strategy – Hampstead Heath Flood Management Water Quality Project

Introduction

Hampstead Heath is one of London's most popular open spaces, with seven million visitors per year.

An oasis of beautiful countryside in urban surroundings, the magic of Hampstead Heath lies not only in its rich wildlife and extensive sports and recreational opportunities, but also in its proximity and accessibility to millions of people. There is a zoo, an athletics track, an education centre, extensive children's facilities, three swimming ponds and a Lido.

The City of London Corporation has managed Hampstead Heath since 1989. The amount spent maintaining the Heath is £6.2 million pounds annually. This money comes from the City Corporation's private funds and not from the UK taxpayer.

In 2009 a study found that dams on some of the Heath's many ponds needed to be improved. They could fail if there was heavy or sustained rainfall. The dams need remodelling to avoid a failure and an inundation of water into residential areas such as Dartmouth Park and from Gospel Oak down to King's Cross. This work is required so the dams meet the existing requirements of the Reservoirs Act 1975, and future requirements set out in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 but not yet brought into force.

In addition the project must preserve, as far as may be, the natural aspect of the Heath as laid out in the Hampstead Heath Act 1871. Conserving the wildlife and the need for a cost effective solution are two other essential elements.

Work has already begun surveying the ponds and once people who use the Heath and the surrounding community are consulted and planning permission is gained and the scheme could be completed by 2015.

Vision

The impact on the Heath will be only as formal as necessary and as informal as possible.

Aims

The communications aims of the project are set out below:

Overall Aims:

- Be clear and open about the project, why it is necessary and the scope of the project
- Manage communications in the public domain positively and effectively.

Specific Aims

- Inform and educate stakeholders, residents and Heath users on the need for the project. Ensure these key audiences are kept informed and are provided with information and understanding of the key issues as and when required
- Ensure communication channels with the stakeholders/residents are open; that they have sufficient information to understand the reason behind the project and are kept informed as to how they can become involved in the process. Update them on how their views/contributions are making a difference to the project.
- Ensure the wider public understand why the project is required and the benefits that will be derived, including educational benefits.
- Ensure that any concern or request for information is appropriately addressed.
- Ensure the press and media is informed and educated to promote balanced and accurate coverage. Provide regular updates and briefings and access to supporting information where possible, including any graphics, maps, photos and illustrations which may be of use.

Key Messages

The messages we have chosen to communicate look to inform around the reasons for the project, progress of the project and the benefits it will bring. Many of these key messages will be applicable to more than one group. Some, or all, of these messages will be used in publicity material and support materials produced for the project. All groups will be made aware we want to hear from anyone who has an opinion on the project or just wants more information; communications around the project will be open and transparent.

Primary

- The aim of the project is BOTH to preserve the natural landscape of the Heath AND ensure the safety of the dams

Further key messages

- The conservation of the natural aspect of Hampstead Heath is a priority
- The design of the new dams must be sympathetic to the the landscape
- This is essential work that needs to be done for the safety and protection of residents and businesses in the area
- It is in everyone's interest to carry out the project with minimal disruption but it is a major project which will require a significant amount of work

- Hampstead Heath will still be open to visitors with only the essential areas not accessible while the works take place
- The project will bring long lasting benefits to the Heath including improving water quality and creating new habitats for wildlife
- This project is led by legislation and the City is the responsible body and is following the advice of the statutory panel engineer
- The project will bring about educational opportunities
- The existing ponds on the Heath are all man made and all have existing dams, some of which are several metres high
- Wherever possible materials from the Heath will be used to strengthen existing dams, creating new habitats for wildlife and reducing traffic movements.

Target Audiences

1. Stakeholder group

This group is made up of representatives from key interest/community groups and will meet regularly to discuss the project. This group will be closely involved throughout all stages of the project providing advice and views to help influence the design and implementation of the scheme.

2. Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee

Twenty-two representatives of local groups and Heath activities, briefed at least every two months. This group will be involved throughout the project and are the body that formally advise the Heath Management Committee.

3. Staff

This includes staff from the Open Spaces division who will be involved in the project and other City of London staff. Staff who will be working closely to the project should be kept fully briefed should they need to respond to questions from the public. Other staff should be made aware of the project and why it is necessary and be briefed throughout the duration of the project.

4. Visitors to Hampstead Heath

People who visit and enjoy the Heath should be made aware of the project and are informed why the work is necessary. They should be given the opportunity to give their points of view and input into the process.

5. Local residents and wider community including schools

Make the community surrounding Hampstead Heath aware of the need to carry out this work. They should be given the opportunity to give their points of view and input into the process. Hard to reach groups need to be specifically targeted.

6. Business Community

Business on and around the Heath should be made aware of the project so they can measure the impact it may have on their businesses and also communicate information to their customers.

7. Other Interest groups

This includes English Heritage, the RSPB, the Environment Agency. These agencies should be kept up to date throughout the duration of the project so they can measure the impact it has on their business and communicate information to their customers. They should also be encouraged to input into the process.

8. Local Authorities which border the Heath

Ensure the relevant council officers at the LA's who border the Heath are fully aware of the project and the effect it might have on their own water management plans and emergency plans.

9. Members and Politicians

Provide all Members of the City of London Corporation and local politicians with information on the project. Lines of communication with the project team should remain open and all members/councillors should be aware they can contact the team at any time for updates/information.

10. Press and media

Gain balanced coverage of the progress of the project in the local and national press at key project milestones. Achieve coverage in the trade press which identifies the project as a significant one. Respond when appropriate to any wrong information printed.

11. Campaign Groups

Keep communication channels open between City of London and campaign/pressure groups to ensure they have the most accurate information on the project.

Media and Press enquiries

Press enquiries on this project should all be directed through the Water Management Communications Officer who will liaise with the Public Relations Office and appropriate officers and members in formulating a response.

Communication Tools

It is imperative that all information that goes into the public domain is controlled and effective.

To ensure this, the communications tools must be appropriate to the audience.

AUDIENCE	TOOLS
Stakeholder Group	Regular meetings Group presentations Site visits One to one meetings with members of the project team Email bulletins Website
Consultative Committee	Regular meetings Group presentations Site visits Email bulletins Website
Staff	Briefings through line managers Site visits Committees Email bulletins City of London internal publications Website (intranet and internet)

AUDIENCE	TOOLS
Visitors to Heath	Exhibitions Website Public events Press and media Advertising /posters in public areas Newsletters / comment cards Opinion pieces/letters to the press Social Networking sites
Surrounding community	Exhibitions Website Public events Press and media Advertising /posters in public areas Newsletters / comment cards Mail outs
Business community and other interest groups	Presentations Site visits One to one briefings Website
Local Authorities	Presentations Site visits One to one briefings

AUDIENCE	TOOLS
	Local Authority publications Website
Members/Politicians	One to one meetings Presentations Briefing packs Site visits Newsletter Website
Press and media	Briefing packs Press releases Regular columns Interviews One to one briefings Site visits Facility visits Website Social Networking sites
Campaign groups	Newsletters Briefing packs Site visits Face-to-face meetings Website