

Committee(s):	Date(s):	Item no.
Hampstead Heath Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	21 st May 2012	13
Subject: Management Work Plans for the Sandy Heath ponds and the Sandy Heath and Flagstaff gorse sites	Public	
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Decision	
<p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>This report presents detailed management work plans for the Sandy Heath ponds and Sandy Heath and Flagstaff gorse sites.</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>That Management Committee approves the management work plans for Sandy Heath ponds and Sandy Heath and Flagstaff gorse sites, subject to the views of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee being received.</p>		

Main Report

Background

1. In order to manage the Heath, it is necessary to prepare detailed documents stating how each area will be managed, in line with established policies. Such documents will then feed into the annual work programme. Management work plans are being prepared for key areas of the Heath; they will last for ten years, and will be reviewed thereafter, although alterations may be necessary sooner if unforeseen events arise.
2. Plans for the Upper Vale of Heath, the Viaduct Pond, Seven Sisters ponds, Third Hedge, Springett's Wood, Orchard and South Meadow areas have previously been presented to the Management and Consultative Committees. This report presents two more plans, for the Sandy Heath ponds and Sandy Heath and Flagstaff gorse sites.

Proposals

The Sandy Heath and Flagstaff gorse sites Management Work Plan

3. The Sandy Heath and Flagstaff gorse patches are 2 of only 3 major gorse sites on Hampstead Heath.
4. Gorse is a component of lowland heathland, which is a target habitat for both the London Biodiversity Action Plan and indeed the national Biodiversity Action Plan.
5. Gorse provides a nesting habitat for a variety of nesting birds, including long-tailed tit and whitethroat, which is of considerable local importance. Stonechat, an infrequent visitor to the Heath, requires dense compact gorse and continued and improved management may encourage breeding.
6. Gorse will be coppiced on a 12 year rotation to maintain a mosaic of different height and age ranges, providing a variety of conditions for invertebrates and birds.
7. Opportunities exist in both gorse sites to expand the current gorse extent and ensure that this 'heathland' plant remains, providing more of the lowland heath habitat which gave Hampstead Heath its name.
8. Two sapling wild service trees should continue to be preserved within the Sandy Heath gorse site.
9. Detailed proposals are listed in Section 3 of the Work Plan, which is attached as Appendix 1.

Sandy Heath ponds Management Work Plan

10. The Sandy Heath ponds are a group of visually attractive pools towards the north-west of Hampstead Heath in an area previously used for the extraction of sand and gravel.
11. The ponds are unusual on the Heath as they occur in geological conditions not normally associated with standing water. The ponds have a variety of aquatic and marginal vegetation including an uncommon liverwort not found anywhere else on the Heath.
12. The ponds are surrounded by woodland which casts shade and cause an accumulation of leaf litter in the ponds. Tree and scrub growth on the edges of the ponds should be managed to prevent further shading.

13. The ponds provide one of the best breeding ground for common frogs on the Heath and should be managed to maintain standing water and prevent drying out in the breeding season.
14. Seven species of dragonfly frequent the ponds, including species such as the southern hawker, which uses the ponds to breed in. With continued and improved management the ponds should be suitable for a number of previously unrecorded species. The presence of floating aquatics including azolla and duckweed is detrimental to this aim and they should be prevented from flourishing.
15. An area of recently established acid grassland occurs to the south of the ponds and should be maintained. Patches of the acid grassland species wavy hair grass also occur in locations surrounding the ponds. A reduction in shade from selected Turkey oaks should improve conditions for this species.
16. A review of any possible reduction in tree cover prior to works should be undertaken to ascertain the likely benefits. A reduction in tree cover is desirable in locations on Sandy Heath in order to increase the extent of sunny, sparsely vegetated habitat which previously made this site one of the best in London for its invertebrate fauna.
17. Detailed proposals are listed in Section 3 of the Work Plan, which is attached as Appendix 2.

Financial and Risk Implications

18. An estimated cost of £1500 based on current prices is required every 10 years to carry out sediment management works on the Sandy Heath ponds. These costs will be met from the Superintendent's local risk budget
19. A cost of an estimated £500 may occur in 2014 and subsequently every 4 years if an external consultant is required to carry out specialist dragonfly surveys on the Sandy Heath ponds. It is hoped that a combination of an experienced volunteer and trained City staff will fulfil this role by then.
20. All other activities included within the management work plans will be undertaken using the Heath local risk budgets. There is a reputational risk in not pro-actively managing the natural aspect of the Heath. Left unchecked the mosaic of diverse habitats for which the Heath is renowned would be lost to secondary woodland cover and ponds in filled.
21. These plans also support the City Bridge Trust work relating to the restoration of lowland heath habitat and control of invasive species.

Legal Implications

22. The City has a legal duty under the Hampstead Heath Act 1871 to maintain the natural aspect of the Heath.

Strategic Implications

23. The proposals link to the theme in the Community Strategy to protect, promote and enhance our environment.
24. They also link to the Open Spaces Department Plan through the Strategic Aim to ‘adopt sustainable working practices, promote the variety of life (biodiversity) and protect the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations’, and the Improvement Objective to ‘ensure that measures to promote sustainability and biodiversity are embedded in the Department’s work’.
25. These works also fulfil a number of Essential Actions in the Part 1 Management Plan, including:

Retain and enhance the Heath’s habitats and natural resources to enable continued quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world by its visitors.

Manage the Heath’s ponds to enhance their nature conservation value

Manage the Heath to protect and enhance populations of plants and animals protected by law, identified as being Priority Species in national and local Biodiversity Action Plans, or identified in subsequent management planning as being worthy of protection.

Manage the Heath’s woodlands and scrub to enhance their nature conservation value and improve their distinctiveness

Conclusion

26. Ten-year management work plans are presented for two areas of the Heath: the Sandy Heath ponds and the Sandy Heath and Flagstaff gorse sites.
27. The establishment of the aims and practices for managing these areas will feed into the annual work programmes for the appropriate years. The management work plans are subject to review at the end of the 10-year period and sooner if unforeseen events occur.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft 10-year Management Work Plan for Sandy Heath and Flagstaff gorse sites.

Appendix 2: Draft 10-year Management Work Plan for Sandy Heath ponds.

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