

Committee:		Date:
Open Spaces and City Gardens	- For Decision	10 December 2018
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queens Park	- For Information	13 March 2019
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	- For Information	14 January 2019
West Ham Park	- For Information	04 February 2019
Port Health & Environmental Services	- For Information	15 January 2019
Subject:		
Tree Pests and Diseases: Oak Processionary Moth urgent update		Public
Report of:		For Decision
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Summary

This report provides Members with an update on the challenges being faced due to the spread of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) across the Open Spaces in the care of The City of London. The OPM caterpillars shed irritating hairs that can cause allergic reactions in people and dogs.

The report also highlights the resource issues with expenditure in the financial year 2018/19 approaching £100,000 across the Open Spaces. It is anticipated that the resource demands for the control of OPM in future years will be in excess of £250,000 pa. It is proposed that these new and increasing resource commitments are highlighted through the Chamberlain to the Medium-term Financial Planning Process scheduled for January 2019.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the challenging position regarding the spread of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) and the partnership work being undertaken with the Forestry Commission.
- Note that the cost of risk based OPM control undertaken in 2018/19 is likely to lead to a small departmental overspend at the year-end.
- Approve the submission of a bid for additional resources to Resource Allocation Sub Committee for future financial years from 2019/20, highlighting OPM as a new and significant resource demand in the medium-term financial planning process.

Main Report

Background

1. Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) (OPM) was accidentally introduced to the UK from Europe through the importation of oak trees for a development site in Richmond, West London in 2006. In a short space of time OPM had spread to a wide area of the Borough of Richmond and by 2008 was found in Richmond Park and Kew Gardens.
2. OPM is a pest species that feeds on oak trees and in extreme numbers can result in the defoliation of a tree. However, the main reason for seeking to control the spread and numbers of OPM caterpillars is that the irritating hairs on the caterpillars and within the communal nests, represents a public and animal health hazard through allergic reactions.
3. The City of London has been working closely with the Forestry Commission, Natural England, National Trust, The Royal Parks, Local Authorities and other land owners to share scientific data and research, practical experience and good practice. Public Health England has also been involved in advising on health issues and the Forestry Commissions communications including: “*Spot it, avoid it, report it*” public awareness campaign. Information has been sent to GP’s across London and Veterinary surgeries have also been contacted to make vets aware of the symptoms and risk primarily to dogs.
4. The City Corporation Chairs the Oak Processionary Moth Strategic Group which helps the Forestry Commission engage with landowners, share the strategic direction being taken by Defra and promote best practice.
5. Control methods have primarily focussed on two approaches; nest removal or pesticide spraying with *Bacillus thuringiensis var kurstaki* (known as Bt) a bio-pesticide. The bio-pesticide is applied in early spring as soon as the eggs hatch and the initial instars (developmental stages) of the caterpillars emerge. Neither approach is 100% effective and the aim of both techniques is primarily to protect public health and reduce the rate of spread of the pest.
6. The City Corporation has taken a risk zone-based approach targeting OPM in areas where the public would be most at risk of being exposed to the caterpillars or nests. This includes removal of nests close to busy locations such as car parks, key paths and buildings, catering facilities, children’s play and sporting facilities.
7. The use of the bio-pesticide (Bt) in the Spring where OPM has already been identified is also carefully targeted. Spraying is kept to a minimum because of its impact on non-target species of Lepidoptera such as butterflies and native species of moth. The collateral damage to the wider biodiversity of a site is a concern with many of the Open Spaces protected through statutory designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNR), and sites of Special area of Conservation (SAC).

8. The Forestry Commission and Forest Research are undertaking a regional pheromone trapping programme with support from Cambridge University. This work is helping to monitor the spread of the pest species and the density of the populations. Research is also being undertaken to consider if there are other viable control methods including natural predators.
9. In reducing the human health risks, we are recognising that City of London Arboricultural Officers and Contractors are at an increased occupational health risk. Where these risks are identified, robust measures are in place to ensure correct protective clothing and good operational practices are in place. Experience across London is that despite these measures individuals may become sensitised to the irritating hairs from the caterpillars and that this can result in unpleasant rashes.
10. To date reports of health issues affecting the public on City Corporation sites is very low, but we are now reaching a ‘tipping point’ at some properties, such as Hampstead Heath, where nest numbers have grown exponentially in 2018. At Ashtead Common; the City Cemetery & Crematorium and Epping Forest numbers are currently relatively low, but these properties are likely to follow the same trajectory of large increases in the number of OPM nests and distribution of this pest species over the next few years.
11. The staff time resource and contractor costs will also increase markedly even with the targeted risk zone approach being taken. Officers have attended OPM training sessions and volunteers have also been trained how to identify the OPM nests to assist in the reporting of infested trees. The presence of OPM also impacts on normal arboricultural work including tree safety and veteran tree management. Contractors and Officers from the Corporation have to be aware of OPM as a risk and remove nests before undertaking tree surgery works.
12. To help illustrate the significant change that has taken place in 2018 the figures from Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queens Park below show the number of nests identified in each year since 2015;

Year	Nests	Trees affected
2015	15*	13
2016	25	20
2017	184	84
2018	2013	680

(*it is likely that OPM arrived at Hampstead Heath in 2014 but was only identified in 2015. Targeted spraying of the pesticide Bt from 2016 will have helped to limit the expansion of the OPM population)

A similar pattern of growth in population was experienced at Ashtead Common where the number of OPM nests grew from 6 in 2016; to 16 in 2017; and 184 in 2018.

13. The Forestry Commission has served under the Plant Health Act 1967, Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHNs) on the City Corporation, requiring the removal the infestations. Failure to comply with a notice can result in enforcement action and possible prosecution. Landowners need to be able to demonstrate that reasonable steps have been taken to control the pest.

Financial Implications

14. The annual spend on contracted services for the control of OPM across the Department will be close to £100,000 in 2018/19 which is close to a ten-fold increase in expenditure on OPM compared to 2017/18. The spend is made up of nest removal, pesticide spraying, pheromone trapping and survey inspections across the Divisions as follows: Ashted Common £29,000; City Cemetery £5,000; Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queens Park £56,500; City Gardens £1,000; Epping Forest £8,000; a total spend in 2018/19 of £99,500.
15. It is anticipated that annual spending on the control of OPM will increase to a figure of circa £200,000 in 2019/20 and plateau at approximately £250,000 to £300,000 in subsequent years. Partner organisations, such as the Royal Parks, have already seen a similar growth in resource commitment having been affected by OPM for a much longer period.
16. The department is profiling a small overspend for the financial year 2018/19 identifying the expenditure on OPM and certain other areas of exceptional spend including the grass and heathland fires experienced in the summer of 2018.
17. It is also proposed that the need for addition resources from financial year 2019/20 onwards is highlighted to Resource Allocation Sub Committee when it considers the medium-term financial planning process in January 2019.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

The Corporate Plan

18. The Open Spaces Department actively contributes to the following Corporate Plan 2018-23 aims and outcomes:

Contribute to a flourishing society

- People enjoy good health and wellbeing
- People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential
- Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need

Shape outstanding environments

- We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration
- We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment.

- Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained

Support a thriving economy

- Our land management supports local businesses and enterprises

Tree pests and diseases including OPM are identified in the Departmental risk register; OPM represents a significant risk to our ability to deliver key outcomes identified in the Corporate Plan. OPM control measures are needed to allow the public to continue to enjoy the natural environments, whilst protecting public health and wellbeing.

Conclusion

19. The expansion of the range and distribution of OPM across London is resulting in the need for targeted control measures to be undertaken across the Open Spaces. The risk zone-based approach is a pragmatic and effective way to address the public health risk and target necessary resources.
20. In the early years of the OPM infestation the costs of control have been accommodated within the existing resource budgets, however, in 2018 expenditure has reached a quantum where such costs cannot simply be absorbed. It is proposed that the additional resource requirement is highlighted through the medium-term financial planning process.

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