

Highgate Men's Bathing Pond | Project Brief
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John Constable, Hampstead Heath with Pond and Bathers, 1821

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HIGHGATE MEN'S BATHING POND

Preliminary Project Brief – Architecture & Landscape.

Site

Hampstead Heath contains over 30 waterbodies, ranging in size from small ephemeral pools to large reservoirs, such as at the Highgate Men's Bathing Pond (Men's Pond). The Men's Pond was created through the damming of Highgate branch of the Fleet stream and is still fed by natural springs arising on higher ground. The Fleet stream is the upper source of the now mostly subterranean remnants of the River Fleet, which still runs from Hampstead Heath through Camden and Kings Cross and into a tidal basin of the Thames where Blackfriars Bridge now stands.

Three of the ponds are reserved for swimming – a Mixed, a Men's and a Ladies' Pond. The Men's Pond is part of the Highgate chain of ponds located to the eastern side of the Heath, off of Millfield Lane.

History

The Hampstead Water Company dug the Hampstead Ponds in the early part of the 18th Century for use as fresh-water reservoirs supplying a large part of North London. The iron-rich water of the springs was popular, and Hampstead Heath became a fashionable destination. Liking it to a spa, people came to 'take the waters'. Around 1777, the Vale of Health Pond was created, together with another series of six ponds (the Highgate chain).

It is not known when people first began swimming in the ponds, but it is thought William Blake was referring to bathing in the Hampstead ponds in his poem *Jerusalem* written sometime between 1804-1820. He writes: 'The Ponds where boys to bathe delight'.

At a similar time, John Constable painted *Hampstead Heath, with Pond and Bathers, 1821* which depicts bathers enjoying wild swimming.

Over the years, the Heath and its ponds have provided inspiration to countless local writers, poets and artists who have immortalised this beautiful site in words and images. In 1961, Sylvia Plath, then living in Primrose Hill, mentions the ponds in her poem *Parliament Hill Fields* calling them the 'linked ponds'.

Today the ponds are run by the City of London Corporation and are no longer used to supply drinking water. However, three of the ponds are classed as reservoirs due to the volume of water they hold. They are Hampstead No. 1 Pond, Highgate Men's Bathing Pond and the Model Boating Pond.

The Men's Pond is open for swimming all year round.

Objectives

The purpose of the Project Brief is to set-out the objectives of the project which will inform the architectural design and an initial cost plan produced by a Quantity Surveyor.

The objective is to create an inclusive layout within the Men's Pond which will enable ambulant disabled and wheelchair users to enjoy this unique bathing facility. The design approach will be to retain the natural feel of the Men's pond and where possible incorporate any environmental benefits which will complement the Heath's wider aspirations for biodiversity. Any interventions would have sensitivity to the existing habitats and to the serenity of the pond's setting. The design will seek opportunities to enhance the area for biodiversity through the planting of native species and will retain any important habitat features within the site.

It is proposed to build a new light-weight compound on the edge of the water to house additional changing facilities for disabled swimmers. These facilities will comply with the Part M of the Building Regulations.

Scope

The requirements for the site are as follows:

1/ Arrival

- 1.1 Entrance to be repositioned to allow a ramped access to the site.
- 1.2 Provision of level thresholds into the facility.
- 1.3 Widening some of the existing paths & modifying fences.
- 1.4 New pay point & relocation of the sign.
- 1.5 Providing cycle parking & dog tethering in a shaded area.
- 1.6 Existing sewage holding tank (still active) to be integrated into the design.
- 1.7 New handrails & new gates.
- 1.8 Relocation of bin store.
- 1.9 Provision of CCTV system.

2/ Lifeguard Observation Hut

- 2.1 Provision of new long window on the south elevation with glazed corners to the West and East elevation to allow a panoramic view of the pond.
- 2.2 Provision of steps to link the two existing concrete platforms.
- 2.3 Re-provision of a new timber pontoon for lifeguards to the South-East of the concrete jetty (access to water) & steps into water for ambulant disabled access.
- 2.4 Reconfiguration of the key clamp enclosure/railings outside the Lifeguards Observation Hut.

3/ Existing Changing Enclosure

- 3.1 Provision of a new door into the existing changing facilities to separate wet/dry routes (reusing the existing entrance door).

4/ Sun-bathing Enclosure

4.1 Removal of section of roof overhang to south of the enclosure to allow more sun into the sun-bathing area. Review the height of the compound perimeter to allow more sunlight to reach this area.

4.2 Relocating the screen/corridor & shower to the north of the enclosure, whilst maintaining the same square footage for sunbathing.

4.3 Electric cupboard to remain in the North-East corner of the enclosure but the space in front could be re-appropriated.

5/ Showers

5.1 Provision of a three new cold shower (min/max 5°C).

5.2 Provision of new door in the relocated screen to the showers for sun bathers.

6/ New Changing Facilities

6.1 Provision of accessible changing, showering facilities and accessible WC in a new lightweight compound on the edge of the pond with a pontoon for disabled access into the water.

6.2 Provision of modesty panels/cubicles.

7/ WC

7.1 WC block to be reconfigured to address the anti-social behaviour.

7.2 WC block to be re-planned and to integrate a 'pissoir' with off the ground metal screens and no roof. Enclosed WC cubicles would also be provided.

8/ Bathing

8.1 Installation of a hoist or alternative to provide access for ambulant disabled and wheelchair users. Provision of slow steps/handrails/chair to be investigated.