

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee	21 st November 2012
Subject: November 2012 Superintendents' Update	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Discussion
<p><u>Summary</u></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 sustainability, general management, conservation, woodland management, infrastructure and the facilities. A separate report has been submitted providing information on progress with the Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>That the views of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee be received.</p>	

Main Report

Background

1. There has been steady progress in a number of key projects and operations over the preceding months since the May report. The Conservation Management Plan is now approaching completion with the final version included with a separate report for the Committee's approval. The staffing restructure is progressing well with the team currently reviewing a new rota, and changes to job roles. The unprecedented wet weather and cold spring caused some disruption to work and sport's fixtures on the field, but when the summer did finally appear the scheduled events were well attended including another successful Heritage day event. The team have been very productive in the area of woodland management and conservation work, with a new conservation area well under way and the deployment of a new mobile work platform for tree work. The wildflower meadow created in March was a great success, despite the wild swings of drought to deluge in the spring and early summer months.

Sustainability

2. In June Highgate Wood underwent its second sustainability audit undertaken by lead by the Highgate Wood Team Leader, with further improvements in energy saving including additional LED lighting and insulation installed in a number of the lodges. The sustainability audit was

verified in September and the verifier's summary comment was 'Overall Highgate Woods has a really positive ethos towards sustainable working. Their work on installing low energy lighting across the site is outstanding and a benchmark for other Open Spaces sites, as is their use of environmentally friendly cleaning products. The drive and enthusiasm of the Green Champion and other staff members is obviously a key aspect of the sites sustainable developments.'

3. In the May update there was a mention of a review of the existing waste management operations in Highgate Wood. This review also includes Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park. Work is in progress to implement a service level agreement with the City of London's waste contractor Enterprise, who operate from Walbrook Wharf. Enterprise have visited Highgate Wood and Hampstead Heath on a number of occasions over the last three months to look at waste operations and disposal streams. The Highgate Wood Manager is now negotiating with Enterprise through the City's own Cleansing team, and seeking a mutually acceptable cost for collection and disposal services in Highgate wood, Hampstead Heath, and Queens Park.
4. It is hoped to reach an agreement on costs and to have a service operating by the New Year. A key part of this service will be to achieve an economically affordable zero landfill waste stream, a requirement that Enterprise are already working to for the City's various departments. In the last 12 months we have sent 32.42 tonnes of general waste for incineration therefore diverting it from landfill along with approximately 4.55 tonnes to recycling.
5. The project to install a photo voltaic system on the Machine shed which was reported in the May update report is still progressing as a feasibility scheme. Some initial works have been identified that need completing on the roof of the building prior to any panels being installed. This will ensure that the roofing fabric does not require replacement during the life span of the solar panel installation. City Surveyor Project team is currently assisting with the preparation of this potential project and a letter has been sent to London Borough of Haringey's requesting confirmation on whether a planning application is required following the recent changes in legislation. Details on the cost of the scheme and repayment periods are still being investigated.

Management of the Site 2014 and Beyond

6. The Highgate Wood Manager has held a series of meetings with the team during September and October to discuss a new staff rota for use after the introduction of the new working arrangements in 2013/14. These are necessary to meet the budget reductions when the City Bridge Trust grant ends. The team are playing a central proactive role in identifying the

optimum shift working patterns, and to ensure that there is the least degree of disruption to operational duties.

7. The summer months are the most challenging and tiring for the team especially those operating the late shifts which finish at 9.45pm. Although the reduction in team size will present some challenges it is already being perceived as an opportunity to improve the work-life balance of the team and this is proving to be an important incentive for introducing the changes.

Heritage and History

8. With the approval of the Conservation Management Plan there will be a requirement to progress the plans initiated over two years ago to return the Roman Kiln to Highgate Wood and apply for funding to carry out the required reconfiguration of the education building. A series of design options were included in the work to produce the first draft of the Management Plan and these will be explored in 2013. This project will provide an opportunity to re-establish links with the Museum of London and the Bruce Castle Museum in London Borough of Haringey.
9. The final version of the Heritage Chapter the first draft of which was appended to last year's November update will be finalised for early 2013. Such is the extensive history of Highgate Wood that it has proven a challenging task to produce even a short accurate history of the site's 2000 year history. There have been a succession of amendments and corrections necessary to produce an acceptable final draft but this should be accomplished early in the New Year. This will provide a concise historical record of Highgate Wood's fascinating history.
10. The new 2012 Conservation area will provide an additional important function to protect the most vulnerable section of the large earthwork structure at the northern end of the site. One of the key objectives identified in the new Conservation Management Plan is arranging for a professional archaeological survey to be carried out on a section of the earthwork to conclusively date the structure and establish a management plan for the long term preservation of this important historical feature. The new Conservation area will remain fenced off for ten years which will provide time for the eroded section to recover.

Progress on the Conservation Management Plan

11. A third draft of the Conservation Management was prepared in September following the recommendations and comments made at the Highgate Wood Consultative meeting in May earlier this year. A fourth draft has been produced for submission and scrutiny for the November Consultative Committee. It is hoped that this will be the final approved

version for adoption and will be introduced formally as Highgate Wood's new strategic Conservation Management Plan from December this year.

12. The Highgate Wood Manager and the team have held two public consultation surveys to measure public opinion on the draft policies and objectives which form the central part of the new Conservation Management Plan, one held on the 2nd September during the Heritage Day Event and the second on the 20th October to focus on capturing the regular user groups such as dog walkers and joggers. The Highgate Wood Manager visited Burnham Beeches in July to source material and ideas on interpretative material and gained some excellent first hand advice on how to organise the consultation event from Helen Read, the Burnham Beeches Conservation Officer, who lead on the Burnham Beeches' Management Plan consultation in 2010.
13. A separate report has been drafted which provides more detail on the Conservation Management Plan, with the latest draft version attached.

Tree management and woodland conservation

14. Tree inspections are progressing well and one of the Wood Keepers has produced a prioritised tree works list on Arbortrac, in readiness for works through the autumn and winter season. Both the Divisional Tree Officer and Wood Keeper attended an Arbortrac one day refresher training course to enhance their skill base and optimise their use of the system. We are about to trial a new tree risk sequencing system which focuses on creating sub zones within our existing high, medium and low risk zones which we currently operate. The benefit of the new system is that we will focus our inspections on what we consider to be the highest priority areas, such as Muswell Hill Road and the Play-area, while still carrying out walk over inspections at regular intervals. This reflects a growing national trend towards tree risk management, where risk evaluation is addressing the actual risk rather than the perceived risk.
15. The new mobile elevated work platform, or MEWP for short has been pressed into action after the team received their training in early October. This piece of equipment has a maximum operational working height of seventeen metres and is already proving to be highly effective for a variety of tree work. The team have carried out reduction work on two dead trees next to pathways and removed significant dead wood on three others. The MEWP is also proving very useful for checking woodpecker holes for bats, during the process of reductions on larger older trees, which would not have been possible before. The team are now able to perform complex dismantling work that would previously have necessitated the expertise and skills of the Hampstead Heath tree team, which is a major step forward.

16. There has been major progress on the creation of the new 2012 Conservation area located to the west of the pathway between the Memorial Fountain and the Bridge Gate. Heath Hands volunteers under the supervision of the Wood Keepers have been very industrious removing large quantities of holly in the western section of the area, creating new coppice habitat and greatly increasing light levels to promote natural regeneration. This work will continue through the winter with the entire area being fenced off and further coppicing.



Figure 1: Holly coppicing in 2012 Conservation area by volunteers

Oak decline survey

17. The survey this year proved to be challenging, mainly due to the late spring and almost total absence of defoliating caterpillars. The oak survey data gathered during June and early July, indicated that the trees were healthier over-all, but this was partly due to lack of defoliation, and later leaf emergence. In order to improve the science of the survey methodology a series of photos have been taken this year of a select group of 29 trees, within the survey population, and a small number outside, with location coordinates carefully recorded.
18. Work is already in process to create a new improved digitised surveying method using the Arbotrac database for next year, and the existing GIS

devices that are currently being used by the Ecology team on the Heath. This will be combined with fixed point digital photography to create a more detailed visual record of canopy changes from year to year. These changes will allow us to create a more accurate sustainable survey process that will be easier to operate and can easily be extended over a longer time frame. Oak trees are a long lived species and a meaningful survey based on sound scientific methodology needs to be sustained over a number of decades and potentially generations in order to be of value.

19. Predictably there have been a further three tree deaths this year, and it is highly likely that there will be further losses this year and in subsequent years. Clearly the woodland is proceeding through a period of decline, which will be carefully monitored. Over the last three years we have increased our understanding of the previous management of the site, and environmental factors, both of which have probably contributed to the decline of the oak standards. Our efforts now need to be channelled into creating a long term strategy to conserve the remaining trees and nurturing a stock of replacements.

Wildlife update



Figure 2: New beehives in 2007 Conservation area

20. It is with great pleasure that we can finally announce the successful installation of two beehives in the 2007 Conservation area to the north of the sports field. The hives are being managed and cared for by the

Kenwood bee keepers association. A recent email from the bee keeper provided an important advice to staff that approach the hives, including a warning not to wear fluffy clothes as the bees are likely to think you are a bear and may become very agitated! On a more serious note this is great move forward after so many enquiries over the years suggesting the introduction of bees.

21. The resident tawny owls had a very good breeding year, with two pairs producing a total of six fledglings over the breeding season. Their calls are still being heard frequently all around the wood at nights. Two new owl boxes were installed this year to encourage the fledglings to stay and these will be carefully watched over the winter and next spring.
22. There have been frequent sightings of a kestrel in the field area, catching mice and frogs, and allegedly rats which hopefully will continue. Kestrels have been a familiar sight in Highgate Wood for 15 years, and their presence is a good indication that there is a viable population of small mammals and other small prey species. Hobbies have also been spotted feeding over the Wood throughout September, also reported locally at Alexandra Palace. Sparrow hawks were seen in the wood but are not believed to be resident, but are of course very welcome. The presence of such a healthy raptor population is very exciting and the hope is that these will grow over the forthcoming years.
23. Noctule bats and Leisler's bats returned to the woods, as they do every year to a roost tree and bat box for several weeks in August and September. The resident bat population have had a difficult year like many other wood residents with a fewer insects and the wet summer. However there is no evidence to suggest that their number have decreased with many sitings during the summer months and two successful evening bat walks.
24. The creation of the wildflower meadow on the southern end of the field has been an unexpected success, largely because the team were convinced for a number of months that there had been very little germination. It was great surprise when flowers started to appear despite the wet weather and by July the site was a blaze of colour, with camomile, marigolds and cornflowers in abundance. The meadow has been a tremendous success with the public and there are plans to increase the size of the area for next spring and reconfigure the perimeter to make it appear less formal. The flowers should provide an excellent nectar source for the resident bee population, and the flowers will help to attract a greater diversity of insects including dragonflies and beetles.



Figure 3: Flower beetle on camomile in the new meadow

Play area and recreation

25. The play area received its annual ROSPA inspection during the summer and was given a complimentary report with no major concerns. There will be a series of replacements to units approaching the end of their service life in the coming months, and several of the play units which experience very high use will receive some much needed refurbishment including the aerial runway. The entrance gate and signage is also going to be updated this winter.
26. The tree sculpture has received another scheduled inspection to determine the integrity of the base of the tree and continues to be within safe margins. This six monthly regime will be continued until it is considered necessary to start a planned dismantling process of the upper part of the tree reducing loadings on the base.
27. Sports fixtures were significantly disrupted during the early part of the cricket season with several weekend fixtures postponed due to the heavy rain and a waterlogged pitch. With the wet conditions there was additional ground damage when teams could play, which necessitated the team to invest considerable extra valuable time and effort in essential maintenance and repairs between bookings. Fortunately the weather did finally improve and the promise of an 'Indian Summer' did finally appear during September.

Infrastructure and Buildings

28. In the previous report there was an update on progress with repairs to the perimeter fencing along Muswell Hill Road. City Surveyors were able to identify funding to replace another section of fencing over the summer and there now remains only a short section still to be completed which will be completed in the next financial year.
29. The new Mitie contract is well underway with inspections carried out at all the facilities and lodges to identify maintenance or servicing issues. The focus to date has been on utilities and security systems.

Community and Events

30. The events programme for the summer proved very popular and despite the fact that the advertised Big Tree Climbing Company dates had to be cancelled the summer holiday programme of activities were very well attended. This year's Heritage Day event was a marked improvement on the 2011 event which was plagued by wet weather. The various stall holders and other participants enjoyed the benefit of the new City of London weather proof gazebos and the team received a great deal of very positive feedback from those attending the event. The innovative Monkey Do outdoor play space team returned to provide an even more exciting temporary structure for the kids to enjoy and parents and children enjoyed the experience, without any accidents.
31. The team have contributed a total of 1,242 man hours towards community work between April and October, which includes all the walk talks for local schools, Heath Hands supervision, adult educationary walks, sports field related work and Heritage Day. Over the course of the coming year with the changes in staffing arrangements there will be a need to review whether this degree of community commitment can be sustained. It is likely that the walk talks that staff provide for local schools may need to be reduced.
32. The contribution from the Heath Hands sessions so far this year is 11 days up to end of October with another 4 planned during November and December of this year. The volunteer's contribution this autumn has been invaluable with the coppicing and clearance work in the new 2012 conservation area progressing well.
33. Timber from two of the tree failures this year has been put to good use, with two separate memorial benches being created on site, one to commemorate the tragic loss of a family's young son, and the other to form part of a memorial to Betsi Cadwaladr, a Welsh nurse who was a contemporary of Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

34. 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

35. 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

36. Despite the planned forthcoming structural changes to the Highgate Wood team, the staff remain positive. Work will continue through the winter to consult with the team members most affected by the planned changes, and provide support and training to prepare them for their new role. With the creation of the new Conservation area and the new work platform the team have a busy period ahead to push forward with woodland management and tree work. The team always look forward to the winter period as this allows them to focus on the all-important conservation work. In the New Year the focus will be on introducing the re-structure and other projects including the Roman Kiln.

Contact:

/ jonathan.meares@cityoflondon.gov.uk /