

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Highgate Wood Consultative Group	07102020
<b>Subject:</b> Superintendents Update - October 2020	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	<b>For Discussion</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Jonathan Meares, Open Spaces Department	

### Summary

This Report provides an update to Members on management and operational activities in Highgate Wood since April 2020. This report also proposes a new approach to engaging with Members of the Highgate Wood Consultative Group on activities at Highgate Wood.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

#### Impact of COVID

1. There was a major increase in visitors from the start of the lockdown in late March through to the end of August. Numbers increased again significantly after the mid May relaxing of restrictions with many more visitors travelling by car and staying longer on site. The Highgate Team had to keep the site open with less staff and had major issues with litter, cycling and conflict between different user groups. The play area, café and toilets were closed, all sports fixtures, events and licenced activities were cancelled. These measures have had a major impact on income generation with some recovery following the café providing a takeaway service and some sports fixtures reinstated.
2. The other impact is on staff with the added anxiety of shielding and the longer shift patterns that were necessary at the beginning of the lockdown. With the end of the summer and the shorter days, there will be a chance to recover but the uncertainty of what the winter might bring is causing concern.
3. There are numerous desire lines throughout the woodland especially near the main pathways where people have been trying to maintain social distancing. It is intended to fence off some of the worst of these areas in order to allow the ground flora and underlying soil to recover.

### **Roman Kiln Project update.**

4. The Highgate Wood Manager remains in contact with the Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln (FOHRK) who are currently setting up a website to broaden support for the project and also attract donations. The HLF bid will be delayed until 2021/22 while there is continued disruption due to COVID.

### **Green Flag and Green Heritage**

5. Green Flag and Green Heritage assessments were desk based this year and we are still awaiting results.

### **Sustainability**

6. The Waste and Recycling operation in Highgate Wood has been severely disrupted during the lockdown period. For the six-week period up until May all the rubbish bins were tapped off as there were insufficient staff to empty bins, and visitors were asked to take their litter and waste home with them. This action was partially successful but with the changes in May and increased visitor numbers rubbish bins were reinstated.

### **Woodland Conservation and Tree Management**

7. Highgate Wood has suffered 31 tree failures since the beginning of April unusually high numbers for this time of the year, but an indication of how the weather patterns are changing. The Heath by comparison has also had a higher than average number of tree failures for the same period.
8. The results from this year's oak decline survey reveal another 2 dead oak trees and there are concerns about the extended drought period and consequences for next year's growing season.
9. The Sparrowhawks have had another successful breeding season, and there have been a number of sightings of the four or five fledglings honing their flying and hunting skills above the wood. Another piece of good news is that recent moth surveys have been numerous which is a reassuring indicator that the biodiversity of the wood has not been adversely affected by the momentous events this year.

### **New Reporting format to Highgate Wood Consultative Group for 2021**

10. In recent years, Highgate Wood Consultative Group meetings have received a written report prepared by the Highgate Wood Manager, summarising management items and achievements at Highgate Wood.
11. In addition, updates are provided to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee at their 4 meetings throughout the year.
12. It would be more efficient to use the autumn meeting of the Highgate Wood Consultative Group to reflect on progress against priority projects to date and begin to set the objectives for the following business year, with the spring meeting being used to finalise the end of year reports for onward submission

to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee and, eventually, for incorporation into the Annual Statement of Accounts, as required by the Charity Commission.

### **Climate Change**

13. The City of London Corporation is scheduled to adopt a new Climate Action Strategy in October this year. The Strategy aim is to reach Net 0 by 2040 and there will be a range of measures implemented to achieve this including increasing carbon sequestration and storage across the Open Spaces alongside biodiversity enhancement and resilience measures. Highgate Wood will contribute to these measures with continued work to improve and conserve existing Ancient Woodland habitat and species.

### **Volunteer activity for 2018/19**

14. Heath Hands sessions have resumed in Highgate with four sessions to date. It was great to have the volunteers back albeit in reduced numbers owing to COVID-19.

### **Tree disease and biosecurity issues**

15. Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) numbers increased in 2020 with 299 nests recorded on 173 trees. This is double the number of nests found in 2019. No spraying was carried out in Highgate Wood this year which may have led to the increase, but on the positive side a significant population of the parasitoid fly *Carcelia iliaca* has been found in harvested nests from 2019 which indicates that natural control of future OPM populations may occur. Number of OPM nests on Hampstead Heath have fallen significantly for two consecutive years so it is hoped that Highgate Wood will experience the same reduction in numbers going forward.

### **Pavilion Café update**

16. The Superintendent will provide an update on the plans going forward with the Pavilion Café.

### **Forest Schools and events**

17. Forest Schools will be resuming their activities this autumn having being suspended for the duration of the lockdown. New licencing procedures are being introduced this winter to better regulate their activities. The cap on forest school groups in Highgate Wood will remain at current levels and groups continued use of the site will be reviewed annually.
18. Community Heritage Day was cancelled this year.

### **Sports Field and Play area**

19. The sports field has suffered a degree of wear and tear over the lockdown but the Keepers have managed to deal with the major slips and trips issues. The ongoing dry weather conditions have also led to ground damage.
20. Several items in the play area are being refurbished this autumn, and quotes are being obtained from contractors.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

21. The activities and projects included within this report contribute to the three objectives and outcomes set out in the Open Spaces Business Plan 2019-20 (a) Open spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible, (b) Spaces enrich people's lives and (c) Business practices are responsible and sustainable.
22. These activities and projects also contribute towards the achievement of the three aims set out in the City of London Corporation Corporate Plan 2018-23. Contribute to a flourishing society (1-4), Support a thriving economy (5) and Shape outstanding environments (9-12).

### **Financial Implications**

23. The operational requirements highlighted in the report will be met from the Superintendent's Local Risk Budget.

### **Conclusion**

24. The pandemic has completely dominated the last six months and although there has been widespread gratitude for keeping the wood open there has been a major impact on the woodland with compaction and erosion damage. Equally the Highgate Wood team have also been affected and hopefully with the arrival of autumn will have a chance to recover.

### **Appendices**

- None

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