

<b>Committee:</b> West Ham Park Committee	<b>Date:</b> 13 October 2020
<b>Subject:</b> West Ham Park Manager's Update	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Open Spaces	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> <b>Lucy Stowell-Smith</b>	

### Summary

This report provides an update to Members of the West Ham Park Committee on management and operational activities at West Ham Park since February 2020.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

### Main Report

#### Budget and Personnel

1. As stated in July, the overall expenditure for West Ham Park is expected to be overspent by around £65k due to a reduction in sports income, events etc due to the coronavirus pandemic. Planned autumn renovation projects have been cancelled apart from essential repairs to worn areas of grass on sports pitches.
2. **Staffing:** Staff that were considered vulnerable due to coronavirus returned to the park in August, meaning that temporary staff could be released. Park Guard continued to provide support to the team in the evenings due to increased visitor numbers. Sickness levels have increased, this is largely due to staff self-isolating due to them or members of their household developing COVID-19 symptoms.

#### Community, Volunteering, Outreach and events

3. **Wild Schools:** The Learning Team were able to run a new programme of family activities at West Ham Park over the summer holidays. Following concerns over the impact of lockdown on mental health, the team particularly wanted to have a positive impact on people's wellbeing. They designed activities to promote wellbeing through spending time in nature, learning new skills, being creative, and working together as a family. Activities such as eco-art and habitat building proved to be very popular. The team used an evaluation toolkit developed by UCL to measure wellbeing and are pleased to report that participants' wellbeing increased by an average of 22%.
4. Throughout the Covid lockdown, the team worked hard to reach those most in need, including developing activity sheets to be delivered via food banks and videos for use in schools with key worker and at-risk children. Over the

summer, the programme continued to prioritise sessions for groups most in need, working with 'Ambition, Aspire, Achieve' in Newham to run a series of sessions for children that have been struggling with anxiety and depression during lockdown. The children learned new skills while helping to maintain the wildlife garden extension in West Ham Park. They commented that they felt a great sense of achievement and really enjoyed helping to take care of the park.

5. Use of the Wildlife gardens by local schools began again in September. All activities were risk assessed taking into account COVID requirements. Our Wild Schools officer left the team in September, but the Learning Team Manager is seeking approval to re-recruit. Until this time other members of the learning team based at other sites will be continuing sessions with the most vulnerable groups and the gardens will still be accessible to those schools who have trained Forest School teachers.
6. **Friends of West Ham Park:** The Friends of the Park have given the team significant support throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Throughout July and August they opened the park daily and conducted a litter pick each day totalling over 200 hours of volunteering. They were concerned by the amount of litter that the public leave behind and in September ran three weekend litter-picking sessions in conjunction with Keep Britain Tidy's campaign. The socially distanced sessions were well attended and although volunteers were only asked to collect litter for 10 minutes the vast majority of people stayed for much longer with one pair helping for 2 hours.
7. Weekly Heath walks restarted in September. Led by the Friends, three socially distanced groups (with 1 walk leader and 5 attendees) walk two laps of the park totalling 5km.

### **Operational activities**

8. The keeper and gardening teams have continued to focus on core duties such as grass cutting, preparing sports pitches, litter collection, weeding and watering. With the increase in visitor numbers and usage of the park this year, along with spells of drought, the grass in the ornamental gardens and in the main parkland is suffering. The team will be focusing on renovating this over the autumn and will be fencing areas off to allow the land to rest and grass to rejuvenate.
9. The London in Bloom Competition continued in 2020, although judges did not visit the park. A desk top assessment was carried out based on how the park had met their three main judging categories of A – Horticulture, Gardening and Conservation, B – Environment and C – Community Participation. The park retained its Gold award and was described by the judge as a 'benchmark' park for London due to the standard of horticulture, our links with local schools and the learning sessions conducted, and our productive relationship with the Friends group and other partners.
10. Sports activity – A slightly extended cricket season came to a close in mid-September. Apprentices from City Gardens came to site to assist the park's

groundsman with end of season renovations and to mark out pitches for the football season. Local secondary schools have returned and continue to use the park as their informal sports field, with over 50 school children in the park daily.

11. **Trees:** so far this year, £21k has been spent on maintaining the park's trees. This far exceeds the £15k normal annual budget for works. There is still another round of inspections to carry out. The canopies of many of the trees in the park are showing significant signs of stress from the prolonged periods of drought over the past couple of years and the change of use of the areas surrounding the park (since some of the older tree stock was planted) causing changes to the soil conditions which no longer favour some of the species found on site e.g. London Plane trees. Our tree surveyors are estimating that we could lose 15-20% of our tree stock over the next 10-15 years. Trees of Mediterranean origin such as Montpellier and Italian maples are thriving. Therefore, we will be working with our tree surveyor over the next 12-18 months to carry out further research and develop a preferred species list and tree planting plan for the future.

### **Property Matters**

12. The Superintendent's office has been undergoing a re-wire, with new fire and intruder alarms fitted. The completion of the project was delayed due to impacts of COVID and a water leak which caused damage to the paint work and carpet. The kitchen refurbishment, decorating of the internal walls and laying of a replacement carpet are due to be completed by the end of October so that the office team can again access the building when necessary. Other operational and public facilities are all open and have been assessed as COVID safe.
13. **Nursery project:** Correspondence with the Charity Commission remains ongoing. All points raised by the Commission have been answered in full and a final response is awaited. Savills Ltd, a commercial consultant, has been appointed to advise on objective setting, soft market testing and a review of the current market. The Senior Development Manager that was appointed in 2019 has unfortunately left the City and recruitment is due to take place in October to refill this position. Once in place and as lockdown restrictions permit, a pre-application discussion with Newham can take place and stakeholder engagement can commence.

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