



The Heath & Hampstead Society

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Heath & Hampstead Society **Proposal for Nature Appreciation Display Boards on Hampstead Heath** **to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the 1871 Act**

Submitted to the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee

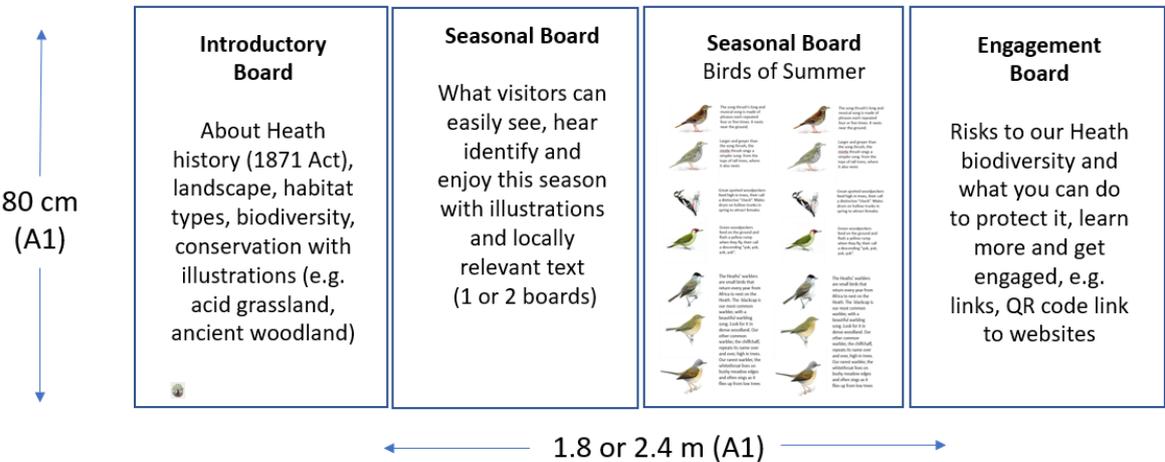
In 2021, we will mark the 150th anniversary of the Hampstead Heath Act, which set aside the Heath for public recreation under the proviso that “the natural aspect and state of the Heath” be preserved and protected. Today, in the 21st Century, no issue challenges the future of the Heath more than that of maintaining that natural state in the face of rapidly increasing visitors and the effects of a changing climate.

To celebrate and support the conservation of this uniquely biodiverse urban open space, The Heath & Hampstead Society proposes to create a series of high-quality display boards which could be placed at entrances to the Heath to introduce visitors to the Heath’s natural history and how it can be appreciated and protected. The display would be run for the entire sesquicentennial year, and changed quarterly to reflect seasonal nature highlights. There would be a particular emphasis on changing birdlife, in memory of Kate Springett, who did so much to popularize and protect birds on the Heath, and making use of valuable information gained from the 2020 Nesting Bird survey, which H&HS ran with City of London and English Heritage.

The intended audience for these boards would be Heath visitors whose enjoyment of, and care for, the Heath could be improved by better understanding of its natural history, including adults and school-age children. The display would therefore include simple, information-rich text and high-quality images of Heath habitats and wildlife. Many London open spaces place signage for nature appreciation and education across their landscapes. This project seeks to achieve similar education and conservation benefits, while acknowledging our shared view that the Heath itself should not be covered with signs.

H&HS has made a preliminary general design for the display, based on research on similar displays in nature reserves and public spaces, which will be discussed and developed with City and other groups that we both feel should be involved, for instance RSPB and the Marylebone Birdwatching Society. The following is therefore only indicative, as H&HS, City and selected groups will make the final design. We are thinking of a mounted display of three or four flipchart paper-sized (A1) boards. The first would introduce the Heath, its protection by the 1871 Act, and its distinctive natural habitats. The next one or two would illustrate bird and other charismatic species that visitors can easily find, identify and enjoy. The last panel will highlight the dramatic recent decline in biodiversity worldwide and in London, and show how

biodiversity on the Heath is being protected in various projects. It will explain how visitors can themselves use the Heath in a biodiversity-friendly way. The centre board(s) would be changed seasonally, to capture our changing wildlife and flora. A possible schematic is shown below:



The emphasis would be on enriching the Heath experience, hence boards would illustrate wildlife that visitors would be likely to see, hear and identify during a visit. Brief descriptions would include a “story” element. For instance, an illustration of the Heath’s woodpeckers like that below might include mention of the green woodpecker’s dependence on anthills for food, which is why they are found in meadows. Unintentional destruction of anthills by visitors and dogs is currently threatening this species on the Heath, hence the display could help visitors be more nature- and conservation-aware.

Illustrations here are borrowed from RSPB website, and we would ask organizations like RSPB to allow us to use their high-quality images.



Great-spotted woodpeckers feed high in trees, their call a distinctive “chik”. Males drum on hollow trunks in spring to attract females



Green woodpeckers feed in meadows at ant hills and flash a yellow rump in flight. Their call is a descending “yak, yak, yak, yak”.

Preliminary discussions between H&HS and City have identified several sites at public entrances to the Heath where copies of the display might be sited in order to engage the greatest number of visitors as they enter the Heath. These include café areas, like Parliament Hill, and possibly car parks. H&HS is has also approached English Heritage to be a partner in this project, with the idea of placing a display at Kenwood. H&HS has set aside funds to develop the boards, and would seek *pro bono* contributions towards design and illustrations.

As a joint effort, the display would be branded with H&HS and City logos and links, and those of other partners. Planning permission would be sought from Camden Council. If approved, an effort would be made to have at least some of the displays in place in January 2021. This would be a one-year project, linked to the celebration of the 1871 Act, but if it proves popular and effective, displays could perhaps be updated and continued.

Prepared by the Heath and Hampstead Society, Heath Subcommittee, 28 September 2020