

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee	24 th April 2013
Subject: Superintendent's Update for April 2013	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Information
<p>Summary</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; the staff restructure, conservation and woodland management, infrastructure and the facilities, and includes a final update on progress with the Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan which has now been approved. This report also provides information on a number of community related projects which the team have been involved in over the winter months.</p> <p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>That the views of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee be received.</p>	

Main Report

Background

1. The preceding six months have been a very productive period with the completion and approval of the new Conservation Management Plan in March 2013 and a number of key projects and operations successfully completed including the new 2012 Conservation area and dismantling the Chainsaw sculpture in the play area. The team have progressed well with tree work over the winter both in terms of safety related operations and also working on a number of trees managed specifically for their conservation value. The episodes of snow we have experienced in the last few months have disrupted some operational tasks and caused some issues for sports activities. There is good progress with the Roman Kiln project with work now underway to apply for Heritage Lottery Funding, and the project to install photo voltaic units on the machine shed should be completed later this year.

Conservation Management Plan

2. The new Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan was approved by the Town Clerk on the 22nd March following final revisions proposed by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Management Committee Meeting on the 28th January. The document is now being finalised and prepared for printing, along with the Heritage Assessment. The Management Plan has undergone a total of eight revisions throughout the consultation period, an indication of the scope of the document and the breadth of the consultation process. The Plan will extend over a ten year period and will be reviewed after five years in 2018.
3. With work commencing on the Management Plan in the spring of 2011 and the advisory group workshop held in September 2011, the entire process of delivering the document from tendering for the consultants to final approval has taken close to two years. A considerable degree of the time invested was devoted to ensuring that core components of the plan were supported by the key stakeholders, and it was clear from the two public consultation events held last autumn that the broad consensus did agree with the vision and objectives of the plan.
4. There is a new emphasis in the Management Plan on working more closely with other neighbouring woodland sites and their respective community groups, along with determining longer term strategies to conserve the Ancient Woodland fabric and address the increasing threat of tree disease. Although the plan only extends to 2023, it is hoped that within that ten year period, the Highgate Wood team will be able to realise many of the objectives identified within the document and ultimately hand over the site to the next generation with greater knowledge and confidence for the future.

Highgate Wood Re-structure

5. Further consultation has taken place with the Highgate Wood team to identify a replacement all year roster system which will now include the Play Area

Attendants in opening and locking up duties. The team invested considerable time and effort in researching and developing an improved roster which has now been adopted on a six month review basis, and was operational from the 1st April. Although the new roster includes the play area staff there will be periods where additional resource will need to be brought in when staff are on holiday or are off work sick. Arrangements are being made to identify suitable casual staff to be drafted in when support is required.

6. Members of the Highgate Wood team have completed a MAYBO training course which focuses on providing skills and techniques to safely manage potential conflict situations. The two Play Area Attendants will receive additional coaching and mentoring from senior team members before starting their new duties.
7. It is also hoped that the Heath Constabulary will be able to provide additional support during busy periods providing of course they are able to deploy adequate cover for Hampstead Heath at the same time. The regular presence of the Constabulary is a welcome site for both the staff and the public and the Highgate Wood team are hoping that this support can be maintained.

Sustainability

8. The new Enterprise contract commenced in January this year and all general waste collections will now be taken to the City of London's waster transfer station at Walbrook Wharf, and from there transported by river barge to the 'energy from waste plant' at Belvedere in Bexley. This facility is managed by Cory Environmental processing over 550,000 tonnes of assorted waste from in and around the London area.
9. Recyclables from Highgate Wood are now collected by the Hampstead Heath Waste and Recycling team, who are operating a regular collection service taking the materials to Kenwood Nursery Yard. This is significant improvement on the previous arrangement as the vehicles used are smaller and there is more control over collection times.
10. The proposed photo voltaic system is progressing well, with planning consent obtained from the London Borough of Haringey, and roof repairs scheduled for late April early May. The contractor has calculated that the proposed 32 panel system will generate approximately 6,400 kilowatt hours annually, which compares favourably to the average annual electricity consumption of the site. The installation will generate sufficient power for all the needs of the machine shed including charging the electric vehicle, and any additional energy will be fed back into the network earning additional income. The City Surveyors project team have been proactive in progressing this important project and their continuing support is greatly appreciated.
11. Gas and Electricity usage in 2012/13 increased compared to the previous year, principally due to the very cold wet spring. Water usage reduced due to the high rainfall and rainwater collectors installed in March last year.

Heritage and History

12. Highgate Wood has provided a fascinating venue for a programme of Woodland Archaeology courses during March looking at features within the woodland which give indications of past history. These included the large earthwork structures but also other previously undiscovered historical sites such as a possible saw pit, and bomb craters dating from the Second World War. The courses attracted considerable interest, and the inaugural session was attended by Mr Hammerson from the Joint Consultative Committee and a retired Wood Keeper, who collectively were able to provide the trainer with a wealth of detailed information about the site.
13. Investigations are underway to carry out a LiDAR (light detection and ranging) survey in Highgate Wood. A LiDAR survey was carried out on Hampstead Heath as part of Hydrological management investigative project and it is hoped that the same technology can be used to commission a high resolution survey of the wood which will produce a three dimensional detailed map of ground features. This will assist with identifying more clearly where the earthwork features are in relation to each other and provide critical information for a future Archaeological excavation project.
14. There has been good progress on the Roman Kiln project with a new working group established and meetings held in December and February. Both meetings were well attended with representatives from The Museum of London, Bruce Castle Museum, the Highgate Society and Birkbeck's department of Archaeology, along with the City Surveyor's Department. A survey of the education building will be commissioned this spring to identify how best to reconfigure the timber built structure to accommodate the entire original Kiln and display material. Rebecca Harrison is also assembling all the information to complete an application for Heritage Lottery Funding. City Surveyors are providing very welcome technical advice on the required works to the building and planning considerations.

Tree management and woodland conservation work

15. The team have had a very productive period over the late autumn and winter months focusing on tree work along the main pathways and principle access routes making good use of the MEWP (mobile elevating work platform) unit which was purchased in March 2012. This piece of equipment was purchased specifically to improve the teams working efficacy on the pathway trees throughout the site. These require dead wooding, reduction and crown lifting for public safety and vehicle clearance considerations. The MEWP has also proved very effective for managing the considerable number of monoliths or managed dead trees throughout the site, as these are often no longer safe to climb.
16. There has also been a focus on managing the trees located along the Muswell Hill Road perimeter fence line, some of which are of considerable size. The team have coppiced a number of the smaller trees including hornbeam and ash, to control their growth especially those growing on the old wood bank just inside the fence line, as these are more prone to root failure.

17. The 2012 Conservation area is now completed with a fence encircling the entire site. Much of the work was centred on clearing holly growth but a number of hornbeam were re-coppiced and it is hoped that these will successfully regenerate later this spring. Heath Hands played a central part in the work clearly enjoying the opportunity to work in an Ancient Woodland environment. One of the key factors that led the team to choose this site for the eighth Conservation area was that it would provide an opportunity to protect a large section of the earthwork. There are now excellent viewpoints down the earthwork from both the main path looking North West, and from the perimeter path looking South East.



Figure 1: Completed 2012 Conservation area

18. The snow that fell in February caused a number of tree failures including six hornbeams where the saturated ground and snow loading on the canopies caused root failures and collapse. A number of these trees may recover, where enough of the root mass has not been damaged. The earlier storm events in January and June 2012 have led to considerable extra work for the Wood Keeper team but they have coped admirably with the additional work and have had invaluable support from the Hampstead Heath Tree team throughout the year.

Play area and Recreation

19. A new play unit has been installed in the under-fives area along with a new heavy duty Hags swing unit next to the aerial runway. New swing gates have been installed at the main play area entrance and under-fives entrance creating a more welcoming child friendly environment.
20. In March a specialist arboricultural contractor was commissioned to partially dismantle the tree sculpture, working with the Highgate Wood team and Hampstead Heath Tree team. The decision to carry out this work earlier was

prompted by the recent accelerated decay in the buttress structures at the base of the tree, which continues to be carefully monitored. The exceptionally wet weather throughout 2012 has probably contributed to this. The operation was carefully planned with a Mercedes Unimog vehicle and crew with lifting equipment hired in, and the MEWP providing a working platform for the cutting operation. The objective was to remove approximately one tonne of timber from the upper section of the sculpture, which would reduce the loadings on the root flare and buttresses at the base. Two large sections were cut and then carefully lowered to ground level, where they will be repositioned in suitable locations. The structure will continue to be closely monitored and a second operation will be required in the future to further reduce the height of the remaining structure.



Figure 2: Tree sculpture dismantling.

21. The field has come under intense pressure over the autumn and winter of 2012/13 due to inclement weather. A number of fixtures had to be cancelled due to the poor condition of the pitches. Regular requests have been received from the leagues asking for additional dates to complete their schedules for the season. It appears that the Highgate Wood pitches have withstood the wet weather and waterlogging better than many of the other pitches available in Haringey and Barnet, which is a great accolade to the teams efforts over the season. One of the Sunday football teams has disbanded due to financial problems within the club, but we have successfully interviewed and appointed a new club for the 2013/14 season. The football season is coming to a close at the end of April and the cricket will hopefully have a bright sunny start. The cricket teams have been coming in now and using the practice nets for pre-season training. The inner netting for the practice area has been replaced, which helps to cushion the ball after it has been hit.

22. Conditions were so wet around the cricket practise net area at the South West corner of the field that the team had to install a temporary small boardwalk to allow the public and staff access around this area due to waterlogging. When conditions improve later this spring the structure can be removed.
23. Two new pieces of fitness equipment have been installed, around the field edge to improve the existing fitness trail, and provide additional interest and exercise activities for the growing community of joggers using the site. The new units are proving popular and are regularly used.
24. The children's football coaching is still popular and around 20 children regularly attend the training sessions during the school holidays for coaching facilitated by a FA affiliated coach.



Figure 3: Snow on the sportsfield

25. The weather seems to be becoming increasingly extreme in recent years. During the spring of 2012 there was an early drought with temperatures well into double figures, and serious concerns about the shortage of water. It seems extraordinary twelve months later that we have had the wettest year in recorded history and that we are still waiting for spring to arrive. London escaped the exceptional snowfall and plunging temperatures of some parts of the country where as much as two metres of snow was recorded in March. However snowfall always attracts people into the Wood, to enjoy the wonderful photo opportunities and the winter landscapes.

Dogs in Highgate Wood

26. The Highgate Wood staff and Management team periodically receive complaints from concerned members of the public about lack of dog control or excessive number of dogs present in the Wood. It is clearly perceived by some users that there is an increase in the number of dogs using the Highgate Wood, although this is difficult to determine without carrying out some form of survey. Unlike Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood does not appear to be used by commercial dog walkers, an issue that causes significant concern amongst users. However the dog walker community are still a very important and visible component of the user group base that come to the wood and unfortunately dog behaviour is often the basis for complaints when they arise.
27. In the 2012 'Tree Top News' issue a short article provided some useful guidance to dog owners when interacting with other users such as joggers and young children. This seems to have made a difference and we hope that we can continue to improve the interaction between all the various user groups that come to the wood. There are also plans to involve the Heath Constabulary in providing free dog control and behaviour advice at drop in events, which have proved very successful at Hampstead Heath.

Community and Events

28. Between the beginning of April 2012 and the end of March 2013 the Highgate Wood team contributed a total of 2,186 hours of their time towards a wide variety of community and education based activities. These included the diarised events programme throughout the year, sports days, Heritage Day, walk talks for local schools and the Heath Hands volunteer sessions. There were also some notable work carried out off site; including a presentation on birds to the Friends of Coldfall Wood in January, and a very successful woodland management day on the Parkland Walk Local Nature Reserve, also in January where a team made up from Highgate Wood and Hampstead Heath contributed a day's work to removing sycamore in the section near Crouch End.
29. Probably the most significant change from 2011/12 was the increase in Heath Hand's sessions. There were two additional dates in January and a further session scheduled in February, with a marked increase in numbers attending despite the Siberian conditions. A total of eighteen volunteer sessions were held from September through to February with 266 volunteer hours contributed, a substantial increase on 2011/12. The Highgate Wood team and management would like to take this opportunity to record their gratitude for all the hard work and commitment that was invested over the autumn and winter months by the volunteers.



Figure 4: Intrepid Heath Hands volunteers

30. Highgate Wood also hosted a one day Tree Inspection training course in February, using the site office for classroom based work and the woodland for field skills. The course was organised by an Arboricultural Consultancy who have developed a tree risk evaluation system, which effectively scores a tree against various criteria. The course was very well attended with tree professionals travelling from as far afield as Poland to take part. It was an excellent opportunity to show case Highgate Wood and it is hoped that further events will be arranged in the near future.
31. The pedestrian loggers installed at all the seven access gates have provided data for the last twelve months, and have recorded a total of 1,095,377 people movements. This equates to a figure of 547,688 visitors for the 2012/13 period which may well be less than previous years due to the poor weather. The play area received a total of 59,880 visits over the same period. This is the first time the system has been able to reliably provide data over a twelve month period.
32. It is always interesting to explore the forgotten past of woodland craft's and in February a carpenter who specialises in creating memorial benches using traditional tools spent several weeks splitting and carving timber from a fallen oak to create two benches; one for Highgate Wood and the other for a memorial commission. The work requires great artisan skill, splitting a large section of oak into sections lengthways using wedges, then hand finishing with a form of adze to achieve a smooth finish, all executed without a single power tool. The work was carried out close to the field edge and attracted a great deal of interest from passing members of the public. The benches are assembled in a workshop, and the Highgate Wood seat will be located outside the office when it is completed later this spring.



Figure 5: Woodworker creating bench legs.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

33. 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

34. 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

35. Despite the challenges imposed by the adverse weather and a busy events programme the team have had a very productive year. The new roster has been introduced with the team embracing the new changes to the operating structure. The successful completion of the new Conservation area with the invaluable help of the Heath Hands volunteers was a great success, along with good progress on the Roman Kiln project and the Photo Voltaic

installation. Woodland management has been given a special focus over the winter months with some major work achieved on pathways and along the road side areas. The adoption of the Conservation Management Plan will now provide clearer guidance for future management focusing efforts and resource on the objectives established in the document.

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