

<b>Committee(s):</b> Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee	<b>Date(s):</b> 12 February 2024
<b>Subject:</b> Assistant Director's update	<b>Public</b>
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	<b>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11 &amp; 12</b>
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	<b>No</b>
If so, how much?	<b>N/A</b>
What is the source of Funding?	<b>N/A</b>
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Executive Director, Environment	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Bill LoSasso, Assistant Director	

## Summary

This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park since the last Committee meeting on 29 November 2023.

## Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the content of the report

## Main Report

### Projects

#### 1. Ponds Access Project

The City Surveyor's Department has acknowledged the challenges faced during the project. The original practical completion date was 21 August, however, the project has encountered issues such as ground conditions, additional drainage works, structural design issues and fabrication issues relating to the jetty structure and mesh platform. The remaining works are limited to snags at the Ladies Pond, and steel grating installation and sliding door installation at the Mixed and Men's Ponds. The contractors left site on 20 December 2023 and returned in January 2024, with the project completion date anticipated to be mid-February 2024.

A new fence will replace the hedge that was removed by the contractors to gain access to the Mixed Pond, and a new metal security shed to house tools and equipment and the new hoist. A new internal security gate with associated fencing at the Men's Pond to prevent access and anti-social behaviour out of hours will also be installed.

A project on a page summary has been prepared in relation to the Ponds Project (Appendix 1).

2. Athletics track refurbishment

The Parliament Hill athletics track project, which included the resurfacing of 8-lanes, track lining and new LED floodlights (full replacement of the existing lights), was completed in November 2023. Testing and commissioning, which included the lighting, levels and measurement surveys, took place the week commencing 20 November 2023. Once all the reports have been received, certification of the track from TrackMark will be gained.

The final inspection took place on 27 November 2023 with the City of London and contractor. The Operations and Maintenance Manual is now being finalised. The track was opened by our Chair, William Upton, on 12 December 2023 for the Highgate Harriers to use for the first time. Positive feedback was received and Athletics Weekly publicised the new track being open. A world-class facility has been created and the track will hold the 'Night of the 10K Personal Bests' in May 2024, which will host the 10,000m Olympic Trials, enabling personal bests and official times. The track will also offer opportunities for increased youth activity and wider community participation. A formal opening event is being planned for the spring.

3. Heath Extension playground

The City of London Corporation has received funding through the Just Giving campaign, the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association, and a private donor for the Heath Extension Playground. The Corporation is very grateful for all the generous donations and was successful in raising all the required funding to instruct the contractors to install the two new pieces of playground equipment and a new willow structure. Theories Landscape undertook the work the week commencing 8th January 2024 and the work has been completed.

## **Constabulary**

4. A separate report entitled "Hampstead Heath Constabulary Update" has been submitted with the papers for this Committee.

## **Nature Conservation, Ecology, and Trees**

5. The Conservation Team have been carrying out coppicing operations below the Vale of Health Pond. This habitat compartment has its own 2014 management plan, focusing on the cyclical management of the wet woodland and other vegetation that

grows along the Fleet Stream between the Vale of Health and the Catch Pit, above the Mixed Pond. Keeping the tree cover controlled encourages a number of species associated with wet woodland, including three species of wetland rove beetles, a number of bird species including wood cocks and water rail, and many mosses and bryophytes. Wet woodland is becoming increasingly rare in the UK and has become a priority habitat. This section of the Fleet River is the only remaining site in London where the famous river can be seen in its semi-natural state before it continues its culverted route down to the Thames.

### **Playgrounds**

6. All the playgrounds across Hampstead Heath have been inspected and reports have been generated with actions that need to be undertaken to ensure compliance. The Head of Operations and Parks has set up a playgrounds subgroup to discuss the inspections, general observations and ensure staff have the appropriate training. A Best Practice Guidance on design, creation, installation and maintenance of playgrounds will then be produced to ensure consistency with playgrounds across the North London Open Spaces.

### **Golders Hill Park**

7. Extensive work continues to be carried out across the park, focusing on horticulture, the grounds, sports facilities, the Pergola and Hill Garden with the help of Heath Hands volunteers, and at the zoo.
8. Work has been carried out at the children's playground and the sandpit play area is currently closed to the public whilst the team carry out renovation works to the sleeper edging, which retains the sand. The area will reopen to the public in the spring.
9. Structural engineers have carried out a detailed survey of the Pergola and issued a report highlighting where works need to be carried out. The eastern section of the colonnade at the Pergola remains closed to the public due to safety concerns with the stone columns. A site meeting occurred in early January 2024 with the City Surveyors to update local teams on future work.
10. The cricket nets on the Heath Extension have not yet been relocated. The City of London Corporation is working with the City Surveyors, England and Wales Cricket Board, and the London Borough of Barnet to secure funding and to gain planning permission. There is no exact timeline for delivering this project, as we need to secure the financial support for this proposal first.
11. The zoo licence inspection was passed without any issues. Four red deer were added to the collection this year, which provides a historical link, as red deer were the first animals to be kept in the park in 1905. The Corporation has continued to work with the marketing company on the zoo's identity. A new logo recently went live, and work is underway with the branding to update the interpretation around the zoo. The zoo has recently launched its new social media channels to update supporters and to promote the work carried out (@GoldersHillParkZoo on Instagram,

@GoldershillParkZoo on Facebook, @GHPZoo on Twitter/X). A Just Giving page has also been set up to aid donations. The experiences are almost ready to go live. Several trial sessions were run, which were all well received, and very positive feedback was gained, and the booking system is being finalised to ensure a smooth booking experience for visitors.

### **Events**

12. A separate report entitled "Review of the 2023 Events Programme & Provisional Events planned for the 2024 Programme" has been submitted with the papers for this Committee.

### **Heath Hands**

13. A separate report entitled "Heath Hands Partnership Agreement Renewal" has been submitted with the papers for this Committee.

### **Highgate Wood**

14. City Corporation officers continue to work with Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln to support the National Lottery-funded 'Firing London's Imagination' project. This will see the excavated kiln reinstated into Highgate Wood, planned for September 2024. The Corporation has appointed a Heritage Officer to co-ordinate the project's engagement with school and community groups. A social media strategy, website and new Instagram channel have been launched to promote the ongoing work. During winter 23/24, plans will be developed for the refurbishment of the Information Hut in Highgate Wood, where the kiln will be displayed and interpreted. Finally, the restoration process is about to begin on the first century AD Roman Kiln artifact in readiness for its return to Highgate Wood later this year.
15. As part of the Extreme Weather Protocol for Highgate Wood, Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park, the current site closure thresholds have been reviewed by the Tree Team and the senior management team. Highgate Wood is an ancient woodland site, and because of the significant number of veteran status trees, the threshold has been reduced from 40mph to 37mph. The Tree Management Team believe this is a proportionate response to the increased risk associated with the older tree profile of the site. The change was implemented in December 2023.

### **Queen's Park**

16. Work commenced on the Children's Sandpit Redevelopment in October 2023 and has been carried out by Blakedown Landscapes. There have been a few design changes along the way due to the Plane tree located within the centre of the sandpit, which involved relocation of the equipment and raising the sand levels to reduce the excavation damage on the root system. Ivy bees were also present within the area and after taking advice from our ecologist, they have been relocated to a quieter area of the park. NCIL funding has been received from the London Borough of Brent. Completion is planned for the week ending 2 February, and an official opening will be planned to celebrate the project.

17. We will continue the relaxed mowing regime along the Kingswood Avenue side of the park in 2024, with the inclusion of picnic circles cut into the long grass for visitors and pathways cut to access the circles.

### **Structure of North London Open Spaces**

18. A separate report entitled "Current structure of North London Open Spaces" has been submitted with the papers for this Committee.

### Financial Implications

19. No implications.

### Resource Implications

20. No implications.

### Climate Implications

21. Included within the annual plan for 2023/24 are a series of projects which contribute towards achieving the City of London's Climate Action Strategy, which was launched in October 2020. A key part of the strategy is conserving and enhancing biodiversity alongside reducing carbon emissions. The Climate Action Strategy will be embedded into future strategies which are currently being drafted within the Natural Environment Division.

### Legal Implications

22. No implications.

### Risk Implications

23. Risks are monitored and recorded through the Departmental Risk Register.

### Equality Implications

24. No impact.

### Security Implications

25. Security implications are monitored and recorded through the Departmental Risk register.

### **Appendices**

1. Ponds project 'Project on a Page'

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