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| <b>Committee(s):</b>   | <b>Date(s):</b>                 |
| Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park management Committee   | 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2013 |
| <b>Subject:</b><br>Hampstead Heath's Hedges and their Management   | <b>Public</b>                   |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Superintendent, Hampstead Heath   | <b>For Decision</b>             |
| <p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>This report presents the results of a survey of Hampstead Heath's hedgerows which was undertaken in 2012. It covered linear woody features which might be managed by traditional hedgerow techniques. These were found to total seven kilometres in length.</p> <p>The data from the survey was used to produce a ten-year management programme, through which all hedges would receive appropriate management to protect and promote the biodiversity and landscape importance of the features.</p> <p><b>Recommendation(s)</b></p> <p>Members are asked to note the report and approve the overall management programme, subject to the views of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee having been received.</p> |                                 |

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. Hampstead Heath possesses a fine resource of hedges, many of ancient origin. Although their management has been on-going over many years, it has been planned on a somewhat localised basis. An overall assessment of hedges and their condition and a long-term programme of management was lacking.

### **Current Position**

2. A survey of hedges on Hampstead Heath was carried out in 2012.
3. A decision was required as to what to include in the survey. The term 'hedge' has been used on the Heath to include features which normally would not merit this appellation. It was decided to include all features which might be managed by traditional hedge management techniques, such as coppicing and laying. Examples are the so-called Hedges 2 and 3 on Parliament Hill, which today are more akin to linear woodland rather than hedges. Former

hedges which are now no more than treelines were excluded, as were formal and amenity hedges.

4. The length of such features was found to total seven kilometres. However, only 1.9 kilometres could be called real hedges, arbitrarily taken as containing a relatively dense shrub layer less than 5m wide. Most of these were planted in the last 30 years or so. Elements of most of the many hedges present in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have survived, but often as lines of trees with little or no shrub layer beneath them.
5. Many of the hedges are very important for maintaining the biodiversity of the Heath. Birds are favoured by a dense shrub layer, as well as bordering habitat such as brambles, which provides additional habitat and valuable protection from dogs. Veteran trees are vital features for invertebrates, of which the Heath harbours some rare species. Most of the Heath's wild service trees grow in old hedgerows.
6. Hedgerows benefit from management. If they are not managed, they lose their character, expanding laterally and often growing into tall, leggy structures with a poor shrub layer. Once this has happened it is difficult to restore them to their original form, but they still require management to retain and enhance their wildlife and landscape values.
7. Such management often entails laying: part cutting shrubs and bending them over so that they re-sprout. This promotes low-growing dense woody growth. Ideally the whole width of the hedge is cut, but if it is very wide and tall, it may only be appropriate to cut part of the width. For example, Hedge 1 has recently been layed in its entirety, whereas Hedge 3 was considered too much of a major visual landmark to cut right through, and only the southern side was layed.
8. Laying should be repeated periodically. 'Gapping up' with new plants may be required if there are insufficient shrubs.
9. Some 320 metres of hedge have been managed in the past two years. About 50 metres of new hedges were planted.
10. Greater detail of the survey and its analysis of the data are presented in Appendix 1.

## **Proposals**

11. A 10-year programme of hedge management is proposed, as detailed in Appendix 1, under which all hedges covered in the survey would have received management by 2022. Work planned for autumn/winter 2013/4 includes laying the western half of a hedge near the north-west corner of the Extension, the other half of which was cut in spring 2013; and laying and gapping up the northern third of the hedge between Preachers Hill and East Heath Road, the rest of which would be managed in subsequent years.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

12. The City has a legal duty under the Hampstead Heath Act 1871 to maintain the natural aspect of the Heath.

13. All hedgerow management proposed will be undertaken using the Heath local risk budgets. There is a reputational risk in not pro-actively managing the natural aspect of the Heath. Left unchecked the mosaic of diverse habitats for which the Heath is renowned would be lost to secondary woodland cover.
14. This project also supports the City Bridge Trust work relating to the survey and management of the Heath's hedges.
15. The proposals link to the theme in the Community Strategy to protect, promote and enhance our environment.
16. They also link to the Open Spaces Department Plan through the Strategic Aim to 'adopt sustainable working practices, promote the variety of life (biodiversity) and protect our Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations', and the Improvement Objective to 'ensure that measures to promote sustainability and biodiversity are embedded in the Department's work'.

## **Conclusion**

17. A survey of the Heath's hedges was undertaken in 2012, and the data obtained were used to draw up an overall management schedule for them. Under this plan, all hedges would have received appropriate management by 2022. The work has already begun, with the next tranche of tasks scheduled for autumn 2013.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Hampstead Heath's Hedges and the Management

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