

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee	20 November 2013
Subject: Superintendent's update for November 2013	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Discussion
<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 since April this year. The report describes progress on sustainability including the new solar panel installation, waste management, the team restructure, conservation and woodland management, infrastructure and facilities, and includes a draft summary document of the Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan. This report also provides information on several other projects which the team have been involved with, including the Roman Kiln and proposed cost saving changes to the play area.</p>	
<p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>That the views of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee be received.</p>	

Main Report

Background

1. The summer of 2013 proved to be exceptionally busy, with the extended period of hot weather attracting large numbers of visitors into the site to escape the heat and enjoy the cooler environment. The warm weather extended into the early autumn attracting high numbers to this year's Heritage Day. The team have worked extremely hard to provide a high level of service during this busy period and at the same time still allow time to host a large number of community based activities including two environmental education programmes aimed at primary school age children. The recent St Jude's storm has had a major impact on the site and the work to clear up is still in progress.

Conservation Management Plan

2. A draft summary document has been produced by the same consultancy team that produced both the ten year Conservation Management Plan and the Heritage Assessment. These documents were adopted in March this year and it was felt that a summary document similar to the one produced for Hampstead Heath was required that would provide the core content of the Plan, and could be made available to visitors both in electronic form on the Highgate Wood website and in paper form on request. A copy of the draft document has been included with this report at Appendix 1 and members of the Joint Consultative Committee are invited to provide their comments.
3. The Highgate Wood Manager will be arranging a meeting in March 2014, with both the Highgate Wood Team and members of the Conservation Management Plan Advisory Group, to review progress on the objectives established within the Management Plan and discuss plans for 2014/15.

Sustainability

4. In August the installation of the photo-voltaic panels on the machine shed roof was successfully completed and the specialist contractor returned in September to switch the system on and provide an induction to the team. To date the 32 units have produced 270kw/hrs, but this low output is to be expected during the winter months. The projected output of the installation is 6,400kw/hrs annually, but much of this will be produced in the spring and summer months when the solar input is optimum. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the team from City Surveyors who led on this project and realised its successful completion, in a relatively short timescale.
5. There are a number of other photo voltaic installations in progress at other sites notably Ashted Common office, which is of a similar size to the Highgate Wood system and it will be interesting to compare outputs over the next twelve months.
6. The Enterprise waste management contract which commenced in January this year has progressed relatively well but, there have been problems with the mingling of the contents of the dog waste bins with the general waste collected from the litter bins. The collection of dog waste remains constant throughout the year, but the general waste falls off significantly in the quieter winter months especially from the sports field area. Consequently, during the winter months the compactor unit will contain a relatively high proportion of dog waste This has led to issues with Enterprises collection team, the matter has now been resolved in the short term with the dog waste being put into separate bins and a weekly collection provided by Enterprise.
7. Unfortunately this problem is not easily resolved as the dog walker community using Highgate wood represents a significant component of the users of the site, and they have come to expect the City of London to provide this service as a matter of course. The Highgate Wood team welcome dog owners to use the Wood providing of course the owners exercise their responsibilities to keep their pets under control and clean up after them. However the issue of

disposal of the considerable volume of waste that the dogs visiting the site produce requires consideration and there is now a need to explore ways of resolving this issue.

Highgate Wood Re-structure

8. The provisional roster introduced in April 2013 has experienced some problems, which were anticipated and the team have drafted a revised version that, it is hoped, will address the issues and improve the work/life balance of the team. It is proposed to adopt this arrangement in January 2014, subject to further consultation with both staff and management. As ever, the challenge is to maintain staff cover during the long opening hours that extend from the middle of May until mid-September, while still providing adequate staff for all the community based activities, sports fixtures and other key duties.
9. The evaluation process for the two new Keeper positions has been completed. During November, letters will be sent out to the team to advise them of progress with the re-structure and updating them on the introduction of the revised roster in early 2014.
10. From April 2014 onwards the team establishment will be six staff, with some additional resource for bringing in casual staff during the summer season, when the permanent staff take annual leave. We have been very fortunate to have had three years of financial support from City Bridge Trust to cover the deleted Wood Keeper post, but this funding will cease from the beginning of the new financial year and the team will need to be more resourceful, to maintain the same level of service that has been provided in previous years.

Heritage and the Roman Kiln Project

11. This project is progressing well with a site meeting held in September with the company Norwegian Log who constructed the Education building in 1996 to obtain detailed costings for reconfiguring the existing building. The meeting was facilitated by the City Surveyors team and the company was requested to provide specifications for a series of revisions to the existing building to accommodate and exhibit the original Roman Kiln.
12. Quotations were received in early October for three different options to expand the building with prices starting at £18,000 through to £33,000 for the version offering the greatest space. These costs can now be used to provide detailed evidence to complete and submit the first round of the Heritage Lottery funding application. There are additional costs which need to be factored in involving the installation of a bespoke display cabinet for the kiln and the new display units for the interpretation.

Tree management and woodland conservation work

13. The St Jude's storm event of the 28th October has and will remain, the focus of the team's efforts over the coming weeks. Information is still been gathered from the other Open Spaces, but initial indications suggest that Highgate

Wood has one of the highest number of trees damaged with a current total of 120. Fortunately there were relatively few total tree failures, most of the damage being focused on branch failures, nether the less, the photographs below provide evidence of the force of the winds. There is no doubt that this storm event was not of the magnitude of the 1987 Hurricane both in terms of wind speed and duration.



Figure 1: clearing storm damage operation



Figure 2: major limb failure on oak

14. The clear up operation has focused on pathways and high use areas first and foremost. It was a great relief to see that there were no damage to any of the road side trees on Muswell Hill Road, probably due to the topography and the protection afforded by the woodland to the west. The team have another two to three weeks work ahead of them removing hanging branches and stabilising damaged crowns, before the clear up work can commence. The Hampstead Heath tree team will be assisting with the work when they can break away from priority work addressing the significant tree damage across Hampstead Heath
15. It is really important to recognise that storm events of this scale are part of the natural weather cycles of a maritime climate, and they do have a beneficial impact on closed canopy woodland habitats, opening up gaps in the tree cover and allowing natural regeneration to occur. The oak population unfortunately took the brunt of the storm with over 95 trees damaged but only six of these were total failures. Although there were many damaged branches this event should initiate extensive regrowth on many of the effected trees and the response during next year's growing season will be carefully watched.
16. The Heath hands volunteer sessions got off to a positive start in September with work starting on releasing a number of the oak standards and allowing more light to reach the lower canopy to encourage epicormic development and gradual retrenchment. The trees selected are part of the oak decline study group and they will be monitored to measure and record their response.

Oak decline Survey work and results

17. The survey is now in its fourth year and there have been some changes in the methodology to improve the data collection process and widen the scope of the information collected. All the oak trees in the survey group have now been plotted using GPS and the field data is collected and recorded using a handheld Trimble unit which can then be downloaded back at the office. A large number of photos have been taken to record canopy health, and fungal species have also been recorded growing within the rooting zones of trees. Additional features have also been recorded this year including buttress morphology and epicormic growth.
18. Four years on from the survey's start in the summer of 2010 we are still no closer to understanding the full picture of why the oaks are dying prematurely. However there is now a significant amount of data and this autumn the Ecologist was able to provide information about the changes in the survey group over the four year period. The overall results are interesting showing a trend of overall stability with over 60% of the trees surveyed showing very little change. There is an encouraging sign of improvement in a number of the trees which will be closely monitored. The springs of 2012 and 2013 were both exceptional in their late onset and this had a wide ranging impact on caterpillar and other insect species which rely on oak foliage for larval development. This may be one of the factors why a number of the trees appear to have fuller canopies.
19. The survey's importance cannot be over emphasised; especially as this appears to be one of only a handful being carried out across the whole of the United Kingdom and its validity will increase with time, time being the critical factor when dealing with a tree species that has an average lifespan of 300 years or in many cases much longer.

Play area and Recreation

20. The existing forest bark play surface in the over fives section of the play area is very high maintenance and requires replenishing every two years at a cost of £2,000 excluding the labour costs involved. The total labour costs alone of managing this surface over twelve months is close to £8,000 which involves daily sweeping up displaced bark, and digging over compacted area to ensure that the surface retains its fall absorption properties.
21. With the reduction in staff and the change in role of the two play area attendants there is a need to identify areas where efficiencies can be made and changing the existing surface to a rubberised one would save staff time and improve the safety of the higher units. Quotes are being obtained from play area contractors and the intention is to focus on re-surfacing the area around the space net unit and the chain bridge down to the disabled area. The prices obtained so far range from £27,000 to £33,000. Quotes will also be obtained for re surfacing individual play units which may allow more flexibility for budget spend this financial year.

22. This year the four cricket teams were exactly the same as previous years. With over 40 games being played between April and September 2012; only three games were cancelled due to a waterlogged pitch. The two Sunday football teams are new as both the old teams were disbanded due to lack of players and financial difficulties. The two new teams are Hornsey & Highgate FC and Lokomotiv Thunder FC. Three teams were interviewed in March 2013 and the two teams above were offered places shortly after.
23. The cricket season finished in September and immediately afterwards a company was contracted in to carry out the renovation work of scarifying the whole square and reseeding and top dressing with new soil in preparation for next season. We will give the square a small covering of Autumn and Winter fertilizer in November to help the new grass set root and hopeful withstand the winter months. The cricket square is now fenced off and the only works carried out now is daily brushing of the grass in the mornings to knock the dew off.
24. The whole field was over seeded at the beginning of October to lay down the foundation for the winter sports programme and ensure good grass coverage throughout the year. We will also carry out an Autumn and Winter fertilize early in November and then a Spring and Summer fertilize in April 2014.
25. It was decided early this year that the management team at Highgate Wood would take full control of applications, bookings, and fixtures for all sports to ensure more effective control of charging. This was decided in June 2013, so we could start the bookings for the forthcoming football season. As a consequence every football team had paid in full their fees before the season commenced ensuring we did not lose this valuable income stream.

Community and Events

26. Highgate Wood received just under 300,000 visitors between April and October with over 30,000 visits recorded to the play area. Heritage Day on the 1st September attracted larger crowds than previous years largely due to the warm sunny weather, and we believe that there were well over 600 people attending the event, a significant number of which were children.
27. The statistics of community hours worked by the Highgate Wood team are impressive, with 1,421 logged between April and October. A large part of this is devoted to the maintenance and upkeep of the sports field and preparation for school sports days during the summer period. Heath Hands have held a number of very productive sessions in September and October and to date have carried out 157 hours of voluntary work largely focused on woodland management. Their work will continue through the winter and it is encouraging to see the group growing in size.
28. Many of the team walk talks and community events are focused on children and in the period between April and October there were 1,455 children visits recorded, excluding the children who came along on Heritage Day. Highgate Wood is now hosting two environmental education programmes for children, which commenced last summer and to date have involved over 300 children. The majority of these children are primary school classes from local schools in the surrounding area, but we do have schools coming from further afield.

Highgate Wood provides an invaluable learning resource for many of these kids, giving them an opportunity to experience a woodland environment in an urban setting. This is a community service that the team enjoy providing and is at the very core of the City of London's Community Strategy.



Figure 3: wild flower meadow and visitors enjoying the warm summer weather

Corporate & Strategic Implications

29. 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

30. 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

31. Despite the reduction in Highgate Wood's staff establishment the level of service provided over the last six months has been of a very high standard. The team have worked through a very challenging period, first having to deal with high visitor numbers during the extended hot summer period then the severity of the recent storm. The team have shown great professionalism and level headedness throughout, and are clearly now thinking of where they can realise efficiencies but at the same time not compromise the level of service that the public have grown to expect.

Appendices

Appendix One Highgate Wood Conservation Plan Summary

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