

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	27 January 2014
Subject: Review of Annual Work Plan 2013 and Proposed Annual Work Plan 2014	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Decision
<p>Summary</p> <p>The report below provides a review of the management operations and activities carried out on Hampstead Heath over the past 12 months as part of the 2013 Annual Work Plan, and presents the new 2014 Work Plan, which is appended to this report.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>That the Management Committee:</p> <p>a) Notes the work undertaken during 2013 to enhance the natural aspect and designed landscapes within the Heath.</p> <p>b) Approves the proposed 2014 Annual Work Plan appended to this report.</p>	

Main Report

Background

1. Hampstead Heath is a complex mosaic of different habitats, comprising extensive areas of grassland, secondary woodland, hedgerows, water bodies, streams, a bog, heathland and formal areas. It is also an extremely popular and well used site. These factors make it complex to manage.
2. The Interim Management Policy Plan for the Heath states, in Policy 6, that the City will draw together an annual work plan for the Heath in consultation with local groups and interested parties. The Annual Work Plan will reflect the primary objective set out in the Mission Statement and will broadly cover planned conservation operations including vegetation, pond and wetland management, tree work and footpath maintenance and fencing works.
3. For completeness the major tasks within the formal areas of the Heath have also been included within the Annual Work Plan.

Review of the 2013 Annual Work Programme

Tree Management

4. The Tree Team have experienced an exceptionally busy year, starting with the heavy snowfalls in February which resulted in a number of damaged limbs, the increased inspection operations necessitated by tree disease and then the St Jude's Storm event on the 28th October which left up to one hundred damaged trees across Hampstead Heath
 - Throughout the last twelve months the team has focused on priority works and have almost completed the first year of piloting a revised tree inspection system, which allows the safety inspections to concentrate on areas of highest risk such as busy highways and high use visitor focal points. To date the team have inspected a total of 1,953 trees at both Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park.
 - Tree disease remains a major issue for the team, with Massaria of Plane now identified across the Heath's 400 London Planes. Inspections have been carried out on the high use areas such as South End Green and the Highgate Road, and suspect branches removed. The team also carried out surveying operations throughout the summer months for Oak Processionary Moth around the perimeter of the site but found no evidence of the caterpillars.
 - De-compaction and diversion of paths that have developed under veteran trees has been carried out at three sites on the second and third hedge lines. The team also installed multiple bracing on the twin stemmed veteran Wild Service Tree next to the Hollow Beech above the Viaduct Pond. A total of 25 veteran trees received works over the period since January varying from compaction alleviation to ivy removal.
 - A survey was carried out to identify the location and condition of all the Hybrid Black Poplars on the Heath. These magnificent trees are among the largest on the site but are susceptible to limb failure, so consequently a schedule of works was drawn up prioritising those requiring work in high use areas.
 - The St Jude's storm event on the 28th October left over 100 trees damaged across the Heath. The Tree Team spent the two weeks following the storm dismantling and making safe those trees in the most critical areas such as roadside, and those in high use areas. A number of trees required specialist dismantling operations due to their locations, including a Lombardy Poplar which collapsed onto the edge of William Ellis School's sports hall. It has taken over a month to get round to all the various locations, but with the assistance of the Conservation Team, the major work is now completed.



Figure 1: Dismantling operation on poplar following the St Jude's Storm.

Nature Conservation Work

5. The Conservation Team have experienced a productive year, with excellent progress on grassland management aided by the new baling equipment, and the completion of the Kenwood Educational Garden. Thanks to the long dry spell this summer the team were able to catch up on works that were outstanding from last year, and also maintain the momentum to complete programmed work in the 2013 Annual Work Programme. As mentioned above, the team have been heavily involved in the clear up operation after the St Jude's Storm event and are still removing all the fallen timber from the more formal parts of the Heath.

Control of Invasive Species

- Giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed control continued, using stem injection techniques.
- Himalayan balsam has been prolific again this season due to high germination rates. A targeted and systematic approach was adopted again, working down the Fleet Stream catchment and along other riparian areas. Yellow balsam control was extended this year across the Heath, again with the assistance from the Heath Hands volunteers. An area of ragwort on Sandy Heath was treated experimentally with herbicides.
- Areas of Californian brome, Michaelmas daisy, Canadian goldenrod and Russian comfrey were cut repeatedly and/or dug up to reduce their vigour

and prevent seeding. Areas of thistles, which are spreading, were cut, and volunteers pulled thistles in selected areas.

Woodland Management and Hedgerows

- Over 60 metres of hedgerow were laid, along the First Hedge on Parliament Hill and on the Heath Extension. This rejuvenated the hedges and provides crucial undisturbed dog-free habitat for nesting birds. Supplementary planting was undertaken to some existing hedgerows, both to fill gaps and diversify the species range.
- There was an on-going programme of volunteer sessions directed by the conservation team to remove non-native tree saplings at various wooded location on the Heath, with particular focus within areas of secondary woodland adjacent to the Spaniards Road and around the Vale and Viaduct.
- Shrub islands at Parliament Hill were coppiced or layed.
- Fifty oak saplings were dug up and potted up for transfer to Northern Ireland, as part of the celebrations.
- Extensive areas of native bulbs were planted at Whitestone Garden.
- Restoration of the old orchard at Springett's Wood was on-going, through additional planting of old fruit tree varieties and restoration work to veteran pear trees.
- 120 metres of hedgerow were planted along East Heath road to provide natural screening for East Heath car park.
- Cyclical coppicing and planting of the hazel coppice in the orchard adjacent to Kenwood yard was undertaken, and further traditional varieties of orchard fruit were also planted.
- Over 1200 Christmas trees were recycled and composted in our annual Christmas tree recycling scheme, run in partnership with Camden council.
- A number of naturalistic looking nesting boxes were once again placed in woodland areas.
- Two more coupes were opened along the Sandy Heath ride, perpetuating this important woodland edge habitat.

Heathland and Acid Grassland Management

- Three exposed sandy banks specifically created for invertebrates have been created by the volunteers at the Vale of Health.

- A number of trees were removed at the base of the slopes opposite the Vale of Health in order to restore valuable Acid Grassland Habitat and improve floristic and faunal diversity
- The area of Gorse was expanded on the West Heath, Sandy heath and Vale of health gorse patches involving coppicing and planting seedlings raised Kenwood Nursery. This work was carried out as part of the City Bridge Trust programme involving the Heath Hands Volunteers
- Two areas on West heath were scraped and opened up to encourage heathland flora.

Grassland Management

- Over 14 hectares of conservation grassland were cut across the Heath between late June and September, and nearly 40 tonnes of baled material removed from the site and transported to a green waste facility where the bales were used by a nearby farm.
- This new method of collecting the arisings from the grassland cutting has made a major impact on the efficiency and sustainability of this critical operation. The Claas baler produces 400 kilogramme round hay bales, which are then loaded onto an agricultural trailer which was purchased this year with the baler. The new trailer can carry up to twelve bales depending on moisture content. Each trailer load represents what the team would have transported previously in 36 separate journeys to the green waste facility. This has achieved a huge cost saving in fuel and also transporting time.



Figure 2: New Claas baler and Voltra tractor

- The perennial wild flower area sown in 2012 on the Old Hockey Pitch looked most attractive this year, and that behind Parliament Hill summit is also developing better after re-sowing last autumn. However, seeds sown this spring in a new wild flower area in Tumulus Field did not germinate, probably due to cold spring and drought, despite regular watering in the dry period. Those sown in the National Grid works area behind the Parliament Hill Café, which is damper, did germinate, but the area became overrun with thistle. It was therefore treated with herbicide. Both areas were re-sown with wild flowers in September, and it is anticipated that fencing may be required until next summer.
- The two annual wild flower meadows, one on the Extension and the other beside Duke's Field, were re-sown in spring and by summer looked most spectacular. In late spring the fences were removed, which resulted in some damage to the meadow at Duke's Field, a very busy part of the Heath. Nevertheless it is proposed to re-sow this popular meadow in 2014, and again remove the fence once the vegetation has established.
- A bed of herbaceous perennials good for producing nectar and pollen was established for the local bee keepers' association to provide additional forage for bees.
- Detailed prescriptions have been developed for the majority of the natural grassland areas incorporating varied timings for cutting and detailing site specific actions.

- Areas of relic acidic grassland have been identified and work has been undertaken to preserve and expand these.
- As with previous years the team have continued to manage the spread of bramble with existing areas cut back to agreed boundaries recognising their value as habitat.
- A pilot corporate volunteer event was held in May where 70 volunteers removed ragwort and tree saplings from the grassland in the Parliament Hill area, and the Tumulus Field.
- Heath Hands volunteers focussed on the conservation of ant colonies across some areas of the Heath.
- Grassland management specifically tailored for grass snakes was carried out in Athlone House Gardens and Cohen's Field.

Paths and erosion issues

- Monitoring for the potential development of bare eroded footpaths across grasslands and halting the development of these through the cutting of alternative desire routes to distribute foot traffic and subsequent compaction.
- Restoration of a number of informal paths through wooded areas achieved via the removal of accumulated mud and detritus, with the aim of reducing erosion and compaction to veteran trees as a result of foot traffic.
- Serious erosion issues to open grassland areas have been addressed with the removal and repair of some informal paths
- Work has continued to improve drainage alongside existing paths and also to reduce gullying at various locations on bound gravel surfaces.
- The cycle path on the southern side of the Tumulus Field was the focus of a programme of irrigation, rolling, and consolidation during the hot summer period which caused the top surface to break up and become dangerous for cyclists.

Ponds

- De-silting of the two ponds on Cohen's Fields to improve water depth and conservation value.
- Installation of dams along catchments to slow water flow and improve the conservation value of ditches.
- Improvements to the marginal edges of the Ladies pond through clearance and additional planting.

- Floating islands in the Model Boating Pond were rejuvenated with supplementary planting.
- As mentioned in the above section on the control of invasive species the conservation team continue to work closely with the Hampstead Heath Angling Society on various projects to improve the fishing environment.
- Several fishing workshops were held during the summer, raising the profile of angling and promoting recreational benefits.
- Regular removal and checking for rubbish, snags and discarded fishing tackle in all the ponds.
- Some judicious coppicing has taken place to trees along the marginal edges of a number of the ponds. This has proved to be very advantageous to the amphibian population due to increased light levels along the all-important warm marginal edges.
- Creation of a new pond to be used by school groups for pond dipping at the Kenwood educational garden.
- New ephemeral pools were dug at Springetts wood.
- Regular removal of blanket weed was carried out at the Whitestone pond between June and September.

Outreach

- Outreach projects for the Conservation Team included: the delivery of recycled materials to a number of community garden projects; digging a wildlife pond at a local allotment site; supplying sustainable coppiced products to a local allotment in Highgate and assisting this site to plant a native hedgerow; and the treatment of Japanese knotweed at a local nature reserve.

Ecological work

6. The Ecology Team were heavily involved with the Ponds Project throughout the year, providing specialist advice to the Atkins design team and then supervising and coordinating a number of the surveys carried out over the spring and summer required for the Environmental Impact Assessment. Despite this they still managed to carry out important habitat monitoring work and provide guidance on conservation work.
 - Amphibian populations were monitored by the ecology team in spring. Twelve volunteers received training in grass snake identification and ecology; grass snake populations were monitored weekly by volunteers from May to October 2013. Six volunteers assisted with crayfish trapping

during 2013; four have been carrying this out on a weekly basis since April and are still continuing. This is largely for monitoring purposes.

- Stag beetle monitoring was carried out weekly by two volunteers along two transect areas on the Heath. A further five volunteers received training from the Ecology team on stag beetle ecology and monitoring. In a further session 10 volunteers and staff received formalised training from a UK expert on Stag beetle ecology.
- The grassland monitoring programme was continued. This showed that the expansion of the Tormentil Slopes last year, by tree and shrub removal, spreading cut material containing ripe seeds, and bramble control, was successful, resulting in the spread of this archetypal acid grassland plant in its only stronghold on the Heath.
- Creeping thistle is continuing to spread on the Heath, despite the programme of annual cutting which has been on-going for many years. Thistle is a valuable plant ecologically, but too much reduces the area of grassland. An experiment was started on Parliament Hill to establish whether more regular cutting will reduce the prevalence of thistle.
- The Ecology Team led a public guided walk on the management of Hampstead Heath and five guided walks looking at grass snake were provided for school children in liaison with the RSPB.
- The Ecology Team liaised with and advised a number of higher education students involved with Heath-related research projects.
- A mixture of ling and cross-leaved heath was planted at the West Heath bog and the West Heath heather slopes. This was in conjunction with a PhD student growing heather in symbiosis with liverwort species.
- A Compartment Management Plan was produced for Sandy Heath Ride in April this year and this was approved by Committee and will be incorporated into the new Annual Work Programme.
- The completed Hedgerow Survey and recommendations were also submitted for Committee approval and were well received. This report will provide improved guidance and planning for future work on the Heath 7 kilometres of hedgerows.
- Quarterly walks were held with the Heath Subcommittee of the Heath and Hampstead Society and ecological walks were held for the LGBT network and the RSPB.
- The ponds were checked weekly for blooms of blue-green algae.

Formal Areas

7. The Gardening and Sport and Recreation Keeping Teams have had a challenging and creative year on completing approved projects in the 2013 Annual Work Programme and routine general maintenance of the formal areas at Parliament Hill Fields, Golders Hill Park, Heath Extension Sports Areas, Pergola & Hill Garden and Keats House. Three separate progress reports have been brought to your committee throughout 2013 on the landscape works at the Ball Path, stumpery update and sustainable bedding.

Golders Hill Park & Hill Garden

- Successful completion and establishment of the sustainable planting scheme in the Walled Garden. The Park Manager and Head Gardener are liaising with representative of Central Square, Hampstead Garden Suburb on knowledge transfer and design ideas for Central Square.
- Following research and a trip to Highgrove House by two front line members of staff, works has been completed on the first phase of the stumpery in wooded walkway next to Lily Pond.
- Planting and establishment of a mixed native hedge row along the wooded fence in the Orchard Field.
- Installation of new shade canopy and items of equipment in the children's play area.
- Installation of two new table tennis tables, which have been extensively used throughout the year.
- Replanting of shrub boarder following building works to the Hill Garden boundary wall.

Parliament Hill Fields

- Successful completion of phase one landscapes works at the Bull Path Entrance, off Highgate Road.
- Planting and establishment of native hedge rows around tennis courts five to ten.
- Replanting of shrub boarder at the Hive, building used by the RSPB for the Wild about Hampstead HLF project with nature species.
- Hard pruning of hawthorn hedge around bowling green and Highgate Road which has improved vigour and air circulation around the plants.

Sports Facilities and Filming Events

- Despite the cold winter, late spring and hot summer, the sports and recreation team managed all the winter and summer sports grass surfaces to an extremely high standard at Golders Hill Park, Parliament Hill Fields and Heath Extension.
- Management and retention of A1 certification from UK Athletics at the Parliament Hill Athletics Track and successful track meetings including the national 10,000 metres event in May.
- Overseeing approximately 45 filming events, ensuring the Heath landscape is protected at all times.
- Grass land renovation establishments works following National Grid works on the Heath Extension.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

8. The protection of the natural aspect cannot be taken for granted and to retain the existing mosaic of vegetation that makes the Heath such a popular open space, whilst fulfilling the basic services to keep the site clean and well maintained, requires significant investment.
9. The landscape enhancement works supports several of the City Together Strategy - The heart of World Class City 2008-2014 themes, including: ... *supports our communities ... protects, promotes and enhances our environment.*
10. The preparation and implementation of an Annual Work Plan in accordance with the Overriding Objective of the Strategic Management Plan "*Retain and enhance the Heath's habitats and natural resources to enable continued quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world by visitors*".
11. The actions for the new annual work plan are set out under the main character areas of the Heath. This follows the format of the proposed Part III section of the management plan, detailed prescriptions of work and includes all those work elements already included in the Management Work Plans.

Implications

12. The costs of meeting this ambitious programme are funded through the Superintendents local risk budget. Wherever possible opportunities will be sought for external funding to support these essential works.

Conclusion

13. The Heath is a complex site and it is impossible to set out in full all the work required to manage it a year ahead. Unanticipated circumstances may require a change of priorities, such as storms. However, the plan establishes our intentions for the year, subject to the Committee's comments.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Annual Work Programme for 2014

Background Papers:

Progress Report on construction of a Stumpery in the woodland walkway - Golders Hill Park

Progress Report on the Enhancement of the Landscaping Works to the Bull Path and Surrounding area at Parliament Hill Fields

Progress Report on Sustainable Planting in the Walled Garden - Golders Hill Park

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