

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee	For Discussion 30 April 2014
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	For Decision 19 May 2014
<b>Subject:</b> Highgate Wood Update – April 2014	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	<b>For Decision</b>

### **Summary**

This Report provides an update to members of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee on management and operational activities in Highgate Wood over the past six months. The Report describes progress on Management Plan Objectives, sustainability, the staff restructure, Conservation and Woodland Management, infrastructure and facilities, and includes a revised draft of the Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan Summary document. This Report also provides information on a number of community- related projects which the Team has been involved in over the winter and spring months, including Heath Hands volunteers and sport activities.

### **Recommendation(s)**

That the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee notes the content of this report, and approves the revised Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan.

That the views of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee be conveyed to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee at their June meeting.

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. The weather since November has presented the Highgate Wood Team with some significant challenges, particularly the continuing Atlantic storm fronts that formed the pattern of weather well into the New Year. There was further damage to trees following the St Jude's Storm over Christmas and the New Year, combined with the very high level of rainfall that left areas of the sports field waterlogged for a number of weeks. Despite these setbacks, the Team has made very good progress on tree and woodland management, and although there were sports booking cancellations, the football teams have

managed to complete their fixtures. The Team restructure is now fully implemented, and there will be a further focus on reducing expenditure and on income generation this year. A good deal of community-based work has been done over the winter and early spring, with additional Heath Hands sessions and well-attended diary events. There have been some important sustainability achievements, with major savings on small fuels and an increasing contribution from the photo-voltaic installation on the machine shed roof. The recent coppicing work carried out in the neighbouring Queen's Wood and in Coldfall Wood has attracted a great deal of interest, and it is planned to adopt the same traditional timber extraction methods for the next conservation area.



Figure 1: Flooding near Onslow Gate

### **Conservation Management Plan Summary Document update**

2. Further revisions have been made to the document that was presented to the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee in November last year. A number of changes were proposed, principally concerning the layout of the draft document and the quality of the maps and images. These changes have been made and the revised draft is included with this report for the approval of the Committee (Appendix 1). Printed paper copies will be circulated to the Committee at the meeting in Highgate Wood on the 30<sup>th</sup> April.
3. Once approved, the Summary document will be placed on the Highgate Wood pages of the City of London website. Hard copies will be printed out and circulated to local libraries and other community groups.

### **Progress on Conservation Management Plan Objectives**

4. The Highgate Wood Conservation Management Plan has now been in place for just over a year, and good progress has already been made in achieving a

number of the objectives. These were divided into short-, medium- and long-term objectives, with short-term agreed as running from 2015 to 2016, medium-term 2016/17 to 2018/19, and long-term from 2018/19 to 2022/23.

5. The Heritage section has a number of objectives focusing on the conservation and interpretation of heritage features within the site. Creating the new 2012 conservation area also involved fencing off an area of 3,300 square meters, including 100 meters of the large earthwork structure which reduced the risk of further erosion and damage to this important feature. During the clearance work, a number of trees were reduced and stabilised along the structure, which will also help reduce the risk of further damage to it. During the spring of last year, Highgate Wood hosted a series of well-attended woodland archaeology walks, several members of the Team attending the sessions and finding them very informative. The tree consultant who led the walks has published an article in the Arboricultural Association's Spring 2014 Newsletter, which mentions Highgate Wood and its archaeological features. He intends to lead further walks this spring for tree professionals and anybody else interested in this subject.
6. Good progress is being made on returning the Roman Kiln to Highgate Wood, which also falls within the Heritage section of the Management Plan. A meeting has been arranged for the 6<sup>th</sup> May to view the Kiln at Bruce Castle Museum, which will be attended by the consultants who are advising on the interpretation and Heritage Lottery Fund application, as well as by a representative from the Museum of London and a member of the Highgate Wood Team. The intention is to proceed with the Heritage Lottery Fund bid and interpretation plan during 2014, with a view to carrying out the conversion to the education building that will house the artefact and display in 2015. This is an extremely important project for the site and it would be a great shame to miss this opportunity, given all the time and investment that has been expended on it so far.
7. There has also been considerable progress with the objectives that come under the Natural Environment section of the Plan. The most significant work has focused around tree health and, in particular, looking at ways to control and manage future tree health risks. The survey work on oak decline has continued, with a further survey planned for this summer. In January the Highgate Wood Manager gave a presentation on Ancient Woodland Management to the London Tree Officers Association, which focused on the survey work in Highgate Wood, while Haringey's Tree and Conservation Team is meeting with the Highgate Wood Team later this month to discuss how this survey methodology could be used on other Ancient Woodland sites in Haringey.
8. Objectives under the Community and Recreation section have also been the subject of much excellent work. Heath Hands volunteers have contributed more sessions over the past two years: in 2013/14 we recorded over 300 volunteer hours spread over 21 sessions throughout the year. There has also been an increase in the number of people attending volunteer events and public walks, with an overall figure of 940 people during the period April 2013 to March 2014, compared with 599 people for the same period in 2012/13. We have also managed to support a number of other local community groups,

including the Friends of Queen's Wood with marginal planting of their wildlife pond, Japanese knotweed control for the Friends of Parkland Walk, and ecological advice for the Pears National Centre for Autism Education in Woodside Avenue.

### **Progress with Highgate Wood Restructure**

9. The Team restructure is now fully implemented, with no need this year for the financial subsidy from City Bridge Trust that has supplemented the staffing budget for the past three years. A letter was circulated to the Team in February, confirming that the roster which has undergone a further revision will run until July this year, then be adopted as the operational roster for the site. The letter also noted that the job evaluation process had confirmed that the two new Keeper positions that had replaced the Play Area Attendant positions would remain at the same grade.
10. The restructure places more emphasis on multi-tasking, with all six members of staff on a single roster and everyone taking an equal share of the core operational work, from cleaning the toilets and litter picking to marking out the sports pitches and assisting with tree work. There are still specialist roles centred around Tree Management that are carried out by the four Woodkeepers, and also some for fine turf maintenance. The entire Team now takes it in turns to carry out routine maintenance on the Play Area.
11. The real challenge will come later, in the height of the summer, when the opening hours are at their longest and the Team will be booking in annual leave. Casual staff were drafted in last summer to cover for those on holiday and the same arrangements will be made this year. It is hoped that the Heath Constabulary will be able to provide additional support during busy periods, provided of course it is able to deploy adequate cover for Hampstead Heath at the same time. The regular presence of the Constabulary is a welcome sight for both the staff and the public, and the Highgate Wood Team hopes that this support can be maintained.

### **Budget - identifying cost saving and increasing income**

12. In March, the Court of Common Council agreed our budget for the year ahead. The City Corporation has worked hard to ensure the financial position is stable. However, like other organisations we continue to face serious financial challenges over the next few years, for which we must be prepared. These include a sizeable reduction in our grant from central government which will result in an overall shortfall of around £13m from 2017/18 onwards. Because of the recent work we have done to implement changes and improve efficiency across the organisation, we now have a stable budget for the next two financial years. This puts us in the fortunate position of having the opportunity to plan ways to close this financial gap. In June, Chief Officers will give Members a broad range of options, over and above that figure of £13m, which will look at ways to eliminate duplication of effort, and examine how to simplify and standardise processes and operations. This may mean delivering our services in very different ways and making better use of our assets.

13. The focus of the Management Team will be on identifying potential areas of reducing expenditure and generating more income. The current annual budget for Highgate Wood is £366,000 of which salaries account for £314,000. There are a number of areas where the Highgate Wood Team could achieve savings, and plans are already underway to deliver £30,000's-worth of work on the Play Area to convert the existing bark safety surface to a low-maintenance and safer rubberised surface. This was mentioned in the previous report to the Committee in November, and it was hoped that a proportion of this work could have been achieved before the end of March 2014, but it was decided to postpone the works until after the Easter holidays. The benefit of this spend will be a significant reduction of staff time and no further requirement for annual topping up of the loose bark surface, which currently costs up to £4,000 each year.
14. Other potential areas to consider will involve reviewing sports booking fees and the Department is working with the Comptroller & City Solicitor to review the opportunity to licence a broader range of activities which could help to manage their impact on the Woods and generate additional income. The sports pitch generates an annual income of around £4,000 in football and cricket bookings. There is the potential to introduce weekly bookings, but this would mean additional maintenance work. The annual cost of labour and ground renovation far exceeds the income generated, with the Team spending over 1,500 hours in total on sports field maintenance, but the sports facilities are extremely popular with both cricket and football users, and the quality of turf care and maintenance is of a very high standard.
15. The many community and educational activities that take place on the site is another area that places a very high demand on staff time. This is a core part of the service that the Team offers and has increasing resonance with the City of London's Community Strategy and the 'London Offer'. Our challenge comes from trying to balance the requirement for providing a highly regarded service to the local community with the forthcoming financial constraints.



**Figure 2: Football match in progress on the sports field**



## Sustainability

16. The partnership with Amey and the City of London's Cleansing Team has improved over the past three months and will be continued. Dog waste still remains an issue but we are hoping that, with continued education and support from the Constabulary, dog owners will continue to clean up after their pets. The Constabulary is focusing on dog control this year and dog awareness drop-in sessions are planned for Highgate Wood over the next few months.
17. The Photo-Voltaic System on the southern section of the machine shed roof is performing well. The system has been operating at a minimum over the winter months, due to the low light levels and the wet weather. However, over the past month there has been a marked change, with the overall energy generation since commissioning last September now well over 1,000kw/hours, with daily ratings of 20kw/hrs. The predicted annual output of 6,400 kilowatt hours looks achievable and with the current output, the system is already meeting half the machine shed's energy requirement, which should increase with longer daylight hours and increased luminosity. The last piece of work to be done is to apply for the Feed-In Tariff, which is being arranged through Carbon Plan. This will enable us to start selling excess energy back into the main network.
18. Utilities use has been variable this year, the main saving being on gas consumption, which was down by 23% due to the mild winter. We have achieved an 18.4% reduction in small fuels over the winter, largely by using battery-powered leaf blowers to clear the paths and Play Area. We have also purchased two new battery-powered chain saws, which we will be testing over the next few months. There are multiple benefits of using electrically powered machinery; reduced noise and vibration for the operator, zero emissions and the units' battery packs can be recharged by the Photo-Voltaic System. They are also often more reliable and therefore cheaper to maintain.

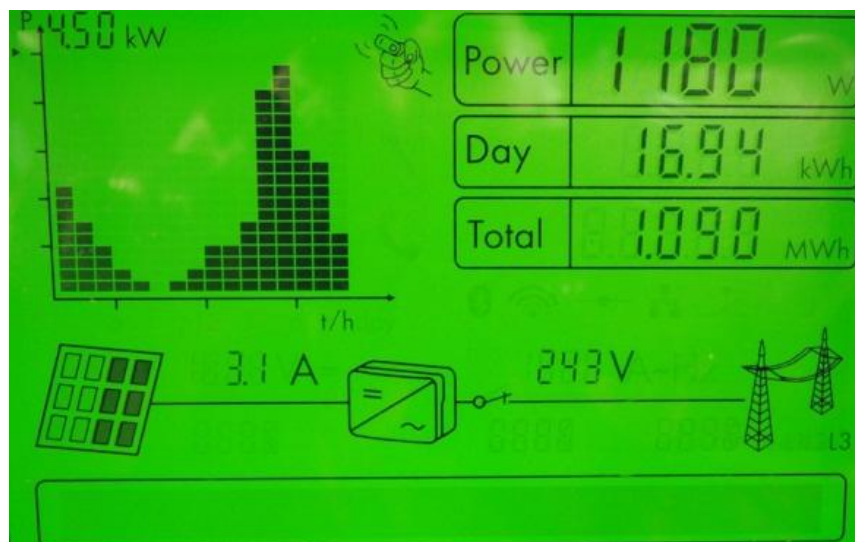


Figure 3: Photo-Voltaic display showing output to date

## Update on the damage caused by storms and the resulting Tree Management

19. The Woodkeeper Team has carried out a huge amount of tree work over the past five months, first dealing with the aftermath of the St Jude's Storm then having additional work as a result of the storms over Christmas and the New Year. The wet weather continued through into early February and has only really improved during the past month, finally allowing the ground to dry out and the Team to reach some of the areas that were waterlogged for weeks during the winter. The work has finally been completed, with over 70 trees requiring the attention of the Team and more than 130 hours spent over the course of the past five months, in between attending to other work. Staff from Hampstead Heath assisted the Team on a number of occasions (figure 4), but the majority of the tree work was managed internally.



Figure 4: Hampstead Heath Tree Team assisting with tree work

20. The Woodkeeper Team also had to spend a significant amount of extra time carrying out tree inspections, as each major storm requires additional inspections, especially of those trees located along the Muswell Hill Road and other high-use areas such as the Play Area. The tree inspection process now follows the methodology used by the Hampstead Heath Team, with walkover inspections zone-prioritised in order of overall risk. Trees that are identified as requiring work are then placed on a list and allocated a priority rating.
21. As mentioned in the November Committee report, there will actually be a long-term benefit from the St Jude's Storm, as several of the larger trees that were blown over have created substantial breaks in the woodland canopy, which will allow a degree of regeneration depending on the situation of the site. We are also anticipating a burst of new cambial growth over the coming years in many of the oaks that sustained branch damage.



Figure 5: Fallen beech near field edge

22. The oak decline survey will be carried out again this summer. As mentioned above, the survey featured in a presentation to the London Tree Officers Association and there are plans to adopt the same methodology in other Ancient Woodland sites in Haringey.

#### **Woodland Management and recent work in Queen's Wood and Coldfall Wood**

23. In January and February 2014 some extensive coppicing work was carried out in both Queen's Wood and Coldfall Wood. At both sites, areas of approximately an acre (or 4,000 square metres) were coppiced and the impact has been spectacular, especially at Coldfall Wood. Coldfall has the benefit of having hornbeam coppice of a more recent age class, which is therefore more likely to regenerate successfully.
24. On both sites the traditional method of horse extraction was used to move the cut timber, which has the great advantage of creating less ground damage by reducing compaction (figure 6). This enabled the extraction work to be done in the very wet conditions around the New Year. Coldfall Wood has a very poor ground flora, and the coppicing should open up a large area to regeneration through the dormant seed bank, and also to other colonising plants.
25. The next Conservation Area in Highgate Wood is due to be created in 2017, in three years' time, and we are hoping that we will be able to use the same timber extraction methods. This would provide an excellent educational and promotional opportunity for the site, and will also be a chance to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the Conservation Areas created over the past ten years in encouraging natural regeneration.





Figure 6: Suffolk Punch heavy horse working in Queen's Wood

### Play Area and Recreation

26. As previously mentioned in paragraph 13, the Play Area will be the focus of a significant investment this financial year, with the installation of a rubberised safety surface. The project will be financed from Highgate Wood's operational budget. There are some minor maintenance issues that are in the process of being resolved, principally around fencing and reducing compaction around trees. The tree sculpture that was reduced just over a year ago and featured in the April 2013 Committee report is continuing to be monitored. It is likely that a further reduction will be required during the next eighteen months.
27. During the winter months, the sports field became so waterlogged that regular maintenance proved impossible. A large part of the western edge of the field was virtually impassable, even when wearing wellington boots, and an extensive area of mud spread out onto the football field, due to people trying to avoid the standing water. Because of the poor field and weather conditions, the Team had to impose a break in the season, which all the teams accepted and were very accommodating about. The last game before the bad weather settled in was played on 29th December 2013, and the first game back there was played on 1st March 2014. Fortunately with the drier and warmer weather, the situation has improved and sports fixtures have once again been able to take place, with all the teams managing to complete their matches.
28. The two new Sunday teams have settled in well and all teams now pay the season's booking fees in advance and in full, which allows for easy administration of payments. This season we have taken a more controlling approach to the bookings and applications for all sports played here in the Wood. All applications and fixtures are now directed to the Highgate Wood Team, which then notifies the Support Services Team which in turn arranges invoicing and payment.
29. The cricket season is due to begin on the weekend of the 26th April, a week after the football season finishes, and hopefully the weather will improve for

the forthcoming season. The Team has already started the necessary preparation work for the first matches. The four Cricket Teams are the same as last season and all have paid their booking fees in full for the forthcoming season.

30. The logger system provided some interesting data for the period from April 2013 to March 2014. According to the data collected, a total of 854,916 people visited the site during that period, with 74,903 of them visiting the Play Area. This is considerably more than the previous estimates of 600,000. There were several missed readings at several gates, so we believe the actual figure could be in excess of 900,000 visitors.

### **Community and Events**

31. Between the beginning of April 2013 and the end of March 2014 the Highgate Wood Team contributed a total of 1,993 hours of their time towards a wide variety of community- and education-based activities. This number is actually down on 2012/13, due to the two-month period during January and February when virtually no work could be done on the sports field because of the wet conditions. The past twelve months have seen the total number of people attending events and other organised activities increase to 2,387, from 2,270 during the same period in 2012/13. The attendance of educational walks and volunteer events has also increased over the 2013/14 period to 940, from the previous year's 599.
32. As already mentioned, Heath Hands sessions remain very popular and well attended, with over 20 sessions scheduled for the 2013/14 period. There was a slight drop in the number of hours over the same period, probably due to cancellations following the St Jude's Storm and the very wet weather. The work that the volunteers carry out has become an integral part of the Woodland Management and we hope to sustain and nurture this service.
33. In February the Conservation Team from Hampstead Heath helped with planting up the Round Pond in Queen's Wood with marginals brought over from the Heath. They also provided some guidance on management of the Pond and its future maintenance. Last summer the Conservation Team also carried out several days of Japanese Knotweed control along sections of the Parkland Walk Local Nature Reserve, which has proved very effective.

### **Proposed changes at the Pavilion Café**

34. The Café Manager has put forward several proposals to increase income potential and improve customer satisfaction at this facility. A plan (Appendix 2) has been included with this Report, showing the two areas that could be reconfigured. The Café catering and serving area presents a number of challenges, due its limited size, and proposals focus on offering customers a faster take-away service, which should increase income. The Café Manager has been asked to undertake a survey of visitors to Highgate Wood to seek their views on what the Café should provide in terms of catering, customer service and quality.

35. The proposal is to build a stand-alone kiosk structure next to the existing brick kiosk for selling snacks, hot drinks and ice creams. This would alleviate the pressure on the main serving area inside the Café and allow customers who do not want a table service meal to buy food and drink to take away. The Café owner is currently assembling a planning application for the kiosk, with a view to opening this facility later this summer. The City Surveyors and the Highgate Wood Management Team will provide guidance on the design and layout of the structure.
36. It is also proposed to create a new outdoor seating area within the existing external paved terrace, where dog owners could sit with their dogs tethered nearby and out of the way of other customers using the main external terrace. The existing arrangement is not satisfactory, as dogs tethered on the fence next to the entrance gate often impede the access into the Café – it also means that dogs are separated from their owners, can become agitated and then start to bark, disturbing other customers sitting in the immediate vicinity.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

37. 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**

38. There are no financial implications arising from this Report. The operational requirements highlighted in the Report will be met from the Superintendent's local risk budget.

### **Conclusion**

39. The weather has once again put the Team's professionalism and skills to the test, but they have dealt with the various challenges extremely well, especially the post-St Jude's Storm period where there was such a large number of damaged trees to deal with. The restructured Team is settling in well and adopting a positive attitude towards the future challenges posed by the SBR and the anticipated budget reductions. The focus will be on identifying areas of work where efficiencies can be made and savings realised. Good progress has been made over the past year on meeting a number of the short-term objectives contained in the Conservation Management Plan, including important projects such as the Roman Kiln and the installation of the Photo-Voltaic System. There has also been a focus on increasing community involvement and, when possible, supporting local community groups.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Conservation Management Plan Summary

Appendix 2 – Café proposal plan

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