

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group - For Information	4 June 2014
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee - For Decision	9 June 2014
Subject: Superintendents' Update on Queen's Park	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For decision
Summary	
<p>This Report provides an update to members of the Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group on the management and operational activities of Queen's Park over the previous six months. The Report provides information and updates on activities in the Park in the following areas; ecology and environment, sport and recreation, conservation and heritage, landscape management, operational management, and visitors and community.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the views of the Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group are received. • That the views of the Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group are conveyed to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Management Committee at their June meeting. 	

Main Report

Background

1. Queen's Park has faced a number of challenges over the winter months. This has included the secondment of the Park Manager to West Ham Park from August 2013 until the end of February 2014. The weather since November 2013 has presented the Team with a number of significant challenges, too. Although the St Jude's storm and the storms over the New Year period had little impact on the Park, the continued wet weather following periods of high rainfall left areas of the Park (including the main field) waterlogged for a number of weeks. The poor weather conditions had an impact on formal and informal use of the Park for leisure and recreation activities, some areas becoming unusable. The Queen's Park Team has suffered the impact of one of its members being absent on long-term sick leave, a process being managed proactively by the Manager. In March 2014, the Park lost a full-time equivalent post to deliver agreed savings over previous financial years (2011/12 - 13/14). The Queen's Park Team is now operating with eight full-time equivalent posts. Four fixed-term contract staff have been recruited to provide support over the summer period.

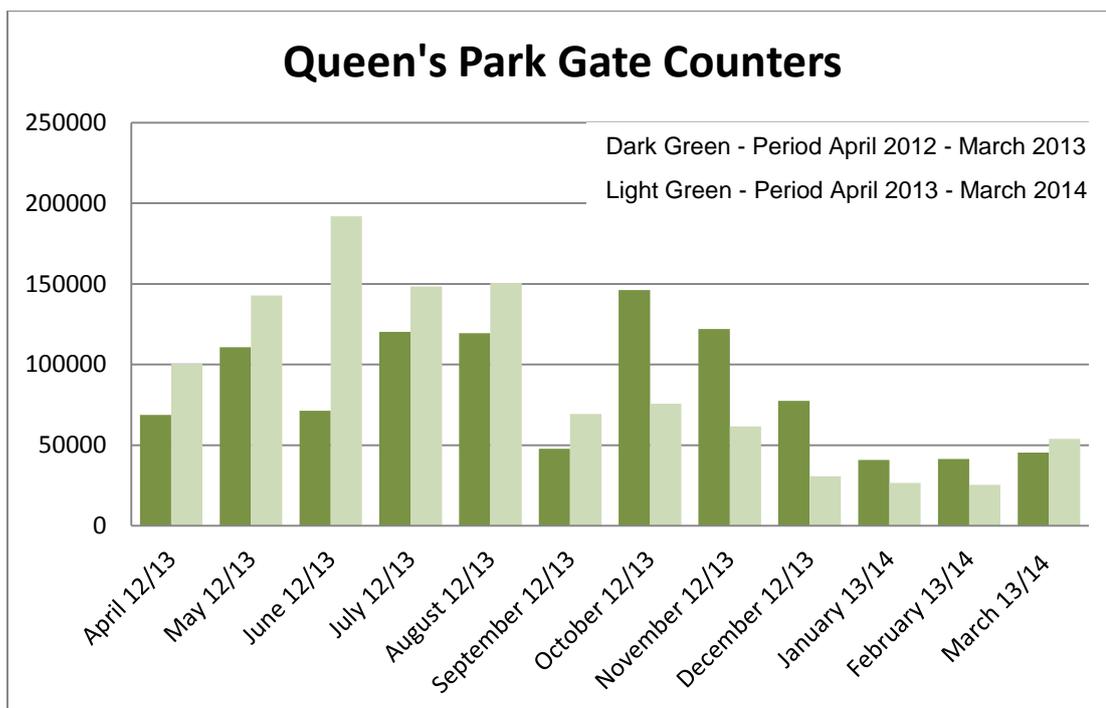


Table 1 - Visits to Queen's Park 2012/13 - 2013/14

2. The Park continues to be a popular destination for the local community and wider London. The table above shows visitor figures, using data extracted from pedestrian counters located at the entry points. Between April 2013 and March 2014, the Park received 1,077,329 visits. The Children's Farm received 121,347 visits and the Children's Play Area 288,519 visits. All the Park's facilities continue to be heavily used, requiring ongoing maintenance and management to ensure we deliver services and facilities to the highest standard.

Ecology and Environment

3. Perennial planting in the Quiet Garden is now established and is an important feature of this tranquil and idyllic garden. The Queen's Park Gardener receives support from other members of the Team, assisting him with the maintenance of the Quiet Garden while demonstrating their ability to multi-task. Staff are gaining confidence and skills across a range of horticulture and estate management activities, with support and guidance from colleagues.
4. The ornamental lawn in the Quiet Garden has been sprayed for moss, weed and worm cast and was scarified in May 2014. Scarifiers have rotating spikes that scratch out the dead grasses and moss, enabling light and rain to penetrate the roots of the grass so that the grass will grow much more healthily. Healthy grass will quickly grow back, leaving the lawn lush and verdant. Guidance, assistance and support from colleagues at Hampstead Heath helped with this objective, while the use of a ride-on scarifier from Hampstead Heath avoided the need to hire in additional equipment.



Photograph 1 - Perennial Planting in the Quiet Garden

5. The shrub border in the Quiet Garden received a hard cut-back this winter; a task which is carried out every 2-3 years. The Gardener and a member of Queen's Park Team carried out the work over a number of days. Information panels were displayed, informing visitors of the task being undertaken and also giving them pruning advice for their own garden. Some summer bedding (which continues to be supplied by the West Ham Park Nursery) was planted at the end of May 2014.
6. The Park continues to use Amey for its bulk waste collection and the collection of dog faeces. There is little evidence of dog faeces not being picked up by dog owners, this positive behaviour possibly being due to the dog-on-lead policy in the Park. Recycling and green waste continues to be collected by the Local Authority, Brent.
7. The Park is currently undertaking a Sustainability Audit with information from this being fed back in to the Departmental Sustainability Improvement Plan. We continue to use a grey water irrigation system on the Quiet Garden and Pitch & Putt Course. A recent investment has been made in a compost tumbler. The compost, which will be produced from leaf litter, will be used on the formal beds and around tree bases in the Park.
8. The Park continues to monitor its utilities usage and will endeavour to reduce this by 2.5% over the next financial year. The Park has the benefit of two electric vehicles and has recently purchased two electric hedge trimmers, reducing the use of fuel for traditional petrol hedge trimmers.

Sport and Recreation

9. Maintenance work has been carried out on the tennis courts over the winter. All six courts were jet washed, which was carried out in conjunction with maintenance work on the tennis courts at Golders Hill Park and Parliament Hill. It is evident that courts five and six require remedial work, in order to

return them to an acceptable standard. The City Surveyor's Department has indicated funding will be available in the 2015/16 Annual Work Programme for repairs and maintenance of the courts, which would involve an overhaul and recoat to their playing surfaces.

10. City of London Tennis Coaching Courses are currently being run, with participants making their booking via the Parliament Hill Sports Booking Assistant. The Manager will be able to provide more detail at the November Committee Meeting on the 'take up' of these coaching sessions. Additional marketing has been employed this spring/summer, including the addition of banners in the Park and on the tennis courts to promote the coaching sessions.
11. The Pitch & Putt course remained open during the winter whilst maintenance took place. The loss of an integral member of the Team due to long-term sick leave has meant their colleagues have had to learn very quickly and support the ongoing maintenance and management of the Pitch & Putt course into the spring/summer period. Over the financial year 2013/14, the Pitch & Putt course hosted 7,127 games and the tennis courts 9,127 games, these figures include both adult and concession bookings.
12. The extremely wet winter had an adverse effect on the use of the main field in the Park. The Saturday soccer coaching sessions had to be postponed for 5 weeks, with the coach advising that he could not play on the field due to the poor ground conditions.
13. Excellent progress has been made on the installation of equipment in the Children's Play Area as part of the Second Phase of the upgrade. Work on this started in late February 2014 and with hard work, commitment and an agreed timescale, the equipment was ready for use before the Easter holiday. The Assistant Manager led on the delivery of the project, utilising resources from across the Division to support the work involved. New planting along the fence line against Milman Road has softened the edge, while the three items of equipment installed comprise a Hexagonal Swing, a Spinning Disk and a Cradle Swing, all of which were purchased from the Park's Local Risk Budget. Previously, donations and financial support have been given through Brent Ward Working, Queen's Park Area Residents' Association and a local resident, although further funding opportunities must be considered to support the continued progress to the next phase of the redevelopment. Feedback on the installation of the current pieces of equipment has been mixed, with a majority in favour of the changes, although some parents have expressed their concern about the lack of playability for younger children. Update notices have been displayed and some parents have had the opportunity to meet with the Park Manager, enabling them to express their concerns and discuss what they can do to support the Third Phase installation.



Photograph 2 - A 'before' and 'after' view of the Play Area Redevelopment

14. Further engagement will take place with the local community and Park users to discuss fund-raising options to support the continuation of the project and the installation of equipment as part of Phase Three.
15. Repairs and maintenance have been carried out to equipment in the sandpit area. An external company has carried out repairs and Park staff will be tasked with painting some of the older pieces of equipment in this area, refreshing them with bright colours.
16. Brent Sports Development Team has expressed an interest in running a further Summer Sports Programme in the Park for one week in August 2014. The multi-sports activities would include football, rounders, mini-athletics games and relay races. The Sports Development Team has asked to use the Park between the 11th and 15th August from 1.30pm - 3.30pm. This activity would have little impact on staff resource and time, and would encourage youngsters to make use of their valuable Open Space.
17. The Park Manager, together with other colleagues within the Department, is seeking legal advice from the Comptrollers & City Solicitors Department about the licensing of commercial and other activities in the North London Open Spaces Division and Open Spaces Department. The Remembrancers Department is undertaking some background research, prior to further legal advice being sought.

Conservation and Heritage

18. The Park has submitted an application for the Green Flag award. An application has also been made for the Green Heritage award. No date has been received yet for when judging will take place.
19. Although currently in draft form, the Park has started to consider some of the Aims and Objectives of the Conservation Management Plan, including;
 - Develop and promote a programme of formal educational activities and resources for schools.
 - Develop stronger links with local schools and explore opportunities to enhance the educational offer at the site.

20. With support from the Hampstead Heath Education Team, the Animal Attendant has delivered a pilot session to Malorees School. Some 25 children attended and positive feedback was received from the teaching staff. The session was based on how animals move.

Landscape Management

21. Work has been carried out on a number of trees in the Park over the winter period, which has included the removal of a chestnut limb on Kingswood Avenue, opposite Hopefield Avenue, and the felling and clear-up of a dead horse chestnut along the fence line adjacent to Milman Road. Pollarding has taken place of the storm-damaged weeping willow in the Pitch & Putt course and pollarding of one of the other three remaining weeping willows also took place; it is proposed to pollard the remaining two willows over the next 2-3 years. Reduction work was also carried out to the laurel tree (hedge) along Kingswood Avenue. These works were carried out by an external contractor, due to existing work pressures already facing the Hampstead Heath Arboricultural Team. However, advice was sought from the Hampstead Heath Team to ensure an appropriate contractor was appointed.



Photograph 3 - Willow following Pollarding

22. Queen's Park has an interesting tree collection, dating from the early McKenzie planting of the late 1880s through to more recent native planting in the past five years. Unfortunately the site's principal tree species is the London plane closely followed by native ash, both being at the top of the current tree disease list. There are a number of other species, which provides some resilience, but there will be a need to plan for a long-term replacement programme if the diseases currently threatening the London plane and the ash become well-established in the London area.
23. Queen's Park has no arboricultural certificated staff, so relies on the full-time Hampstead Heath Tree Team carrying out tree inspections and tree safety works. A number of Park staff have received basic tree-inspection training and

they have been very proactive in passing on information about potential tree problems.

24. The current and continuing proliferation of tree diseases is causing a great deal of concern across the tree-management industry, with the additional separate issue of imported insect pests. The diseases and pathogenic insects currently causing greatest concern are Ash Dieback, Oak Processionary Moth, and Massaria of Plane. In addition there are well-established diseases that have already reduced the tree stock significantly, including Horse Chestnut Bacterial Canker. Sadly most of these diseases have been introduced by human activity and it seems that despite all the plant import legislation and movement controls, the diseases have spread throughout the UK.
25. When it comes to spreading plant pathogens, the rapidity of the spread of Ash Dieback in the autumn and winter of 2012 demonstrated just how effective we are at doing Nature's job for her. There has been a great deal of discussion about the way the Ash Dieback outbreak was dealt with in 2012, and how we should learn from the mistakes that were made in the 1970s and 1980s with Dutch Elm Disease. Although Ash Dieback was not discovered in the London area in 2013, it is expected to arrive in the next two years and the disease will have a major impact if it becomes established at Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park, where there are significant populations of ash trees.
26. In the spring of 2012 the fungal disease Massaria was discovered in Queen's Park, then identified shortly afterwards in various locations on Hampstead Heath, including high footfall areas such as South End Green and along the London Overground line boundary to the north of the Lido. It was very quickly realised that this issue needed to be given the highest priority and, with guidance from other tree managers in Royal Parks and neighbouring Boroughs, measures were put into place to manage the risk, including identification and removal of infected tree limbs and a raised frequency of inspection.
27. Between Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park, the Tree Team now has to deliver additional inspections of some 500 London planes, which is taking up a significant amount of their operational working time. The London Tree Officers Association has now released a comprehensive guidance document on managing Massaria on urban plane trees and this document will be adopted for future management of the disease.
28. Oak Processionary Moth has been the target of a concerted programme of eradication, financed by central government through the Forestry Commission, with the objective of stopping the pest from spreading further out into other parts of London. Last summer, 150 known sites in and around London were treated with insecticide, and the operation has been considered to have had a significant impact. The Tree Management Team is working closely with the Forestry Commission and other organisations such as the London Tree Officers Association, in order to obtain the best advice and support in controlling this pest in the event of an infestation.

Operational Management

29. In March 2014, the Court of Common Council agreed our budget for the year ahead. The City Corporation has worked hard to ensure that its financial position is stable. However, like other Local Authorities across the United Kingdom, 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, with 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 different ways and making better use of our assets.
30. During the financial year 2014/15, the focus of the Queen's Park and Divisional Management Team will be on identifying potential areas of income generation and the reduction of expenditure. The current annual budget for Queen's Park is £529,000 of which salaries account for £434,000. The Queen's Park Team has previously considered new ways of reducing their expenditure, which have included the installation of an irrigation system and the change in the planting scheme in the Quiet Garden, using perennial planting instead of seasonal bedding.
31. Other potential areas to consider will involve reviewing sports booking fees. The Department is also working with the Comptroller & City Solicitor to examine the possibility of licencing a broader range of activities, which could help manage their impact on Queen's Park while generating additional income. There is further opportunity to increase income through the Park holding appropriate events, bench-marking its sports charges against those of other local authorities, and charging for commercial and other licensable activities.
32. The many community and educational activities that take place in the Park is another area that places a demand on staff time. Apart from the time spent on the maintenance and management of the Park, this is an increasing area of importance for the staff. This is an area of the service that the Queen's Park Team wants to develop, as it 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, against the forthcoming financial constraints.
33. The Children's Farm has seen a number of new editions. In spring 2014, four Giant Rabbits were collected by the Animal Attendant and delivered to their new home in the Farm, their addition having proved very popular with visitors.
34. New signage has been purchased by the Manager and is displayed in the centre of the Park on stand-up boards. The posters are displayed on one of the busier through-routes in the Park. The signage has been produced in the new Open Spaces identity and advises users of two things; 'Dogs must be

42. Small children's rides will be in the Park over the Whitsun Bank Holiday Weekend. The income received from this activity funds the Hampstead Heath Education Team's visits to Queen's Park in August.
43. Six new accessible benches have been purchased and are located outside the café. These benches are designed to allow wheelchair users access to the picnic benches.
44. The memorial benches that are located on the grassed area adjacent to the Bandstand are in the process of being paved with granite setts. Metal edging has already been installed as part of this project. In liaison with the City Surveyor's Department, the Park Manager may be able to source granite setts from Epping Forest.
45. A demonstration of charcoal-making took place in the Park in February. Two local individuals asked permission to demonstrate this activity in the Park and in doing so generated some interest in their craft.



Photograph 4 - Before the kiln is lit - Charcoal Making demonstration

46. A number of local schools continue to make use of the Park, including Kensal Rise Infants, Malorees, St Luke's Infants, the Islamia School, Queen's Park Community School and Salusbury School. Visits focus on educational activities, bulb planting and work experience. Team members have also attended local schools to talk about their role as a Park Keeper or to 'show and tell' about the animals we look after in the Park.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

47. The management and provision of Queen's Park provides a vital retreat, enabling people to escape the daily pressures of living and working in London. The Park fulfils many of the themes within the **City's Community Strategy**, but specifically providing "A World Class City which protects, promotes and enhances our environment". "A World Class City which is vibrant and culturally rich". "A World Class City which supports our communities".

48. It will also contribute to the **Department's Strategic Aims and Objectives 2014/15**, by *providing valued services to London and the nation and widening offer to Londoners*.
49. The Parks activities continue to deliver the Open Spaces Departmental values of; Quality, Inclusion, Environmental, Promotion and People.

Implications

50. There are no financial implications arising from this Report, as the operational requirements referred to will be met from the Superintendent's local risk budget. There are no legal implications arising from this Report.

Conclusion

51. Following a wet and windy winter, the Queen's Park Team has worked hard to maintain the Park and deliver services to a high standard. The redevelopment of the Play Area has received positive feedback from the local community, with practical support received from across the Division and Department in delivering the Second Phase of the work. The Park continues to be a popular Open Space, receiving over one million visits per annum. It's recognised within the community, as an Open Space with a variety of facilities, delivered to a high standard, serving a wide and diverse audience. The staff working in the Park take great pride in the service they provide to the community, and are actively engaged in a number of initiatives to ensure that the management of the site is sustainable and operates within the financial limits set down by the City Corporation.

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