

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee	19 November 2014
Subject: Superintendent's update for November 2014	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Information
<p style="text-align: center;">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 over the past six months. The Report describes progress on cost saving and income generation, sustainability, conservation and woodland management, infrastructure and facilities, and includes a final draft of the Project Board Committee Report for the Roman Kiln Project. This Report also provides information on a number of community-related projects that the Team has been involved in over the summer months including Heath Hands volunteers and sport activities.</p> <p>Recommendation(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee notes the content of this report. • 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 meeting in January 2015. 	

Main Report

Background

1. The Team has had a good summer season. The long dry period that extended from May through to July provided some welcome good weather for sports pitch management, and also enabled the new play area safety surface to be installed on schedule, ready for the summer holidays. Cost saving and income generation have been a focus for the Team and there has been significant progress in this area through increased licencing and reduced maintenance costs at the play area. The effective use of casual staff has enabled the Team to provide adequate staffing cover over the busy summer period, and the Roman Kiln Project has now progressed through the City of London's Project Gateway Stage One. There have been various

refurbishment works carried out at several of the lodges, while the café has introduced a trial dog- friendly area on the external searing terrace.

Budget –identifying cost saving and increasing income

2. In the April Committee Report, reference was made to the planned resurfacing work to the play area, which would release a significant amount of valuable staff time and eliminate annual maintenance. The works (which cost just under £24,000) were successfully completed on schedule before the summer holidays in July and the Team has already been able to see the benefits, both in efficiencies and cost saving. Previously the task of digging out the old compacted bark and then spreading several tonnes of costly new replacement material was a time-consuming operation that had to be carried out every year. It also necessitated closing the play facility and involved the use of machinery and delivery vehicles, all of which caused a degree of disturbance to the public. The newly installed surface is a great improvement to an already highly regarded play area and has been well received by the public.
3. In terms of income generation, Highgate Wood now offers a variety of licenced events on the site, which collectively generate a significant income. The four licenced educational activities have brought in a total of £3,826.95 between April and August. Filming and photography has brought in an additional £350. All four of these licenced events look set to become established activities on the site and we intend to look for suitable additional opportunities to expand this area of income generation.
4. The sports field provides a regular annual income amounting to £4,045.72, with Football bringing in £2,200.00 and Cricket £1,845.72. Considering the very high standard of sports field maintenance and the level of work invested in the facility, we feel there is justification to increase the fees for the coming season. The teams who use the field often comment on the quality of the pitches and the relatively low charges. This is a major consideration when the City of London's costs for sports provision in Highgate Wood vastly outweigh the income generated.

Roman Kiln Project progress

5. The Roman Kiln Project is progressing well. A Projects Gateway Stage One Report has been submitted and has been through a series of revisions, following circulation to various Officers in the City Surveyors Department. The Report was also presented to the Open Spaces Director and Superintendent's Management Team in September. The Highgate Wood Manager is currently updating the report to take on-board the feedback from Gateway 1. This will then allow the Kiln Project to progress to Gateway 2 and consideration by the Corporate Project Board Sub-Committee. If the Board gives approval, the project will progress to the Heritage Lottery Fund application stage.
6. Alongside the work to obtain corporate approval, there has also been promising progress on developing an Interpretation Plan for the project, as well as producing some initial design concepts for the display of the artefact

and the layout for the reconfigured Education Facility. The project has attracted a significant degree of community interest and involvement, encouraged by a stall at Highgate Wood's Heritage Day Event presenting the interpretation proposals and inviting the public to provide feedback on the ideas. We are very grateful for the generosity and commitment of Nick Peacey, who organised and ran the display and provided information on the proposals.

7. The final version of the Report submitted at Gateway 1 has been appended to this document. Also included is the proposed display layout, showing how the Kiln will be exhibited.



Figure 1: Roman Kiln stand at Heritage Day

Sustainability

8. Together with Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park, Highgate Wood is once again carrying out the Sustainability Audit, to measure the three sites' performance over the last two years and establish how well they are performing. This audit is also being carried out across the other Open Spaces, and the information and evidence gathered will form part of a Departmental Improvement Plan, to be drafted in November/December.
9. The audit process consists of a self-assessment carried out by one of the Team, which was completed in May, followed by a verification audit carried out by one of a group of other Open Spaces staff. This provides a useful reference check for the site and focuses on what changes have occurred since the previous audit; both positive and negative.

10. Highgate Wood's overall sustainability performance has been very good, with the photo voltaic system performing well over the protracted good weather that we all enjoyed this summer, and an increasing emphasis on moving away from petrol engine-powered equipment. The new collection of battery-powered equipment is all proving very popular with the Team who find the battery-powered units much lighter and quieter to use. The zero emissions are also a major benefit for both the operator and the environment.

Conservation Management Plan Summary Document

11. The final revisions are being made to the Conservation Management Plan document, and the revised document will be circulated to the Committee as soon as the new cover design has been completed which has to comply with the new Open Spaces Department identity guidelines. It is hoped that a hard copy will be ready to circulate at the meeting on the 19th November for the Committee's views.

Woodland Conservation and Tree Management

12. In May the Team was still clearing storm damage from the October and subsequent December and New Year storms. With the trees coming into leaf, a number of limbs and entire trees (including several old hornbeam coppices) lost large limbs over the spring and summer period. We lost several substantial oak limbs over the summer months, probably due to weakened unions caused by the autumn storms.
13. As this autumn begins, a walk through the woodland reveals a number of limbs still caught up in the trees and debris still on the ground. All the remaining work is off the paths and busy areas, and the Team will gradually work its way round as time permits. Many of the fallen branches attracted ground-nesting birds in the spring and for this reason, the arisings were left as they provided good cover and nesting habitat.

Oak Decline Survey

14. This year's oak decline survey was made significantly quicker through the use of the GPS Trimble recording device, only taking six days. Staff still have to review the field data from this year's survey, and the results will be available later next month. In general, the survey group of oaks in the wood were not that vigorous this year, due in part to storm damage to crowns and early leaf-mining damage to leaves. Interestingly there were no dead oaks recorded this year within the survey squares, but oaks outside the squares have been noticeably dying, and probably at least two trees died this year.
15. We are considering changing the format of the survey to include oak regeneration as well as oak decline. Next year's survey may be split between the two areas, with a new survey methodology established to measure natural regeneration. We will continue to measure decline but probably reduce the number of trees surveyed, allowing time to carry out the regeneration survey alongside. There have been two prolific mast years for oak, the autumn of

2013 and the autumn of 2010. Many of the seedlings that germinated are still viable, although a large number succumbed to oak mildew. This spring the staff protected 100 of these seedlings with tree shelters and it will be very interesting to see how they develop.

16. There appears to be a local and possibly nationwide trend in the complete lack of any acorns this year, as can be also seen on Hampstead Heath and neighbouring Queen's Wood.

Tree Disease and biosecurity issues

17. Tree disease is still very much a focus for the Team. The programme of containment and eradication of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) launched in the summer of 2013 by the Forestry Commission has had mixed success. This year there have been further advances by the pest and there is now an infestation at the Regent's Park Zoo, which is just over two kilometres from the southern perimeter of Hampstead Heath
18. The Highgate Wood Manager and the Division's Tree Officer are finalising an action plan to deal with what is looking inevitable; the arrival of this pest at either Hampstead Heath or Highgate Wood. Once its presence has been confirmed, the Forestry Commission initiates a programme of spraying in a short time window between May and June, when the larval caterpillars emerge to feed. A pheromone trap supplied by the Forestry Commission was installed in Highgate Wood in July to trap the male moths.
19. We are preparing ourselves for next spring and will have as many staff as possible trained up to spot the signs of the pest before any infestations can develop. Most importantly, we will need to work closely with other tree management professionals and the Forestry Commission's OPM Management Team, to optimise the chance to control the spread of this pest throughout the woodland.
20. Those familiar with the control of OPM on sites where the pest has become well established are sanguine about eradication, and are now resigned to costly and time-consuming management operations. We hope that we can identify and eradicate these caterpillars before they get a foothold.

Play area and Recreation

21. The play area safety surface improvements were successfully completed in time for the busy summer holiday period. A total area of 350m² was converted to a rubberised surface consisting of the space net unit and the cluster of units immediately adjacent, all of which must have an impact-absorbing surface to protect against injuries. The annual RoSPA report was carried out immediately after the completion of the works and the overall feedback from the inspector was good, reflecting the improvement works. There are still some minor tasks to be completed in the facility but further major investment will not be required this financial year.
22. The cricket season finished on 7th September. This year was a major improvement on last year's playing season, with just a single cancellation due

to inclement weather. The football season kicked off the following weekend and we are hopeful that the winter weather will not be as stormy and wet as in 2013.

23. Highgate Wood has a zero policy on using pesticides and herbicides, which necessitates hand-weeding to eradicate the weeds on the cricket square. This is a labour-intensive process that commences in March and continues throughout the season until early September. We apply organic spring / summer fertilizer to the cricket square approximately three times during the playing season to help the grass stay vigorous and resilient to diseases. The rest of the sports field receives one application of an all-round fertilizer in April.



Figure 2: Play area resurfacing under construction

24. At the end of August, we purchased turf and top soil to carry out repairs to bare areas from last season's football goal areas and laid new turf ready for play in mid-September. The turf has established well and the pitch is prepared for the forthcoming season. At the end of the cricket season, two contractors were brought in to carry out renovation work to both the cricket square and the football pitches.
25. The Team is mindful of the cost both in labour and materials required to maintain the sports field and provide the accompanying facilities. There will be a focus over the next six months on this operational area and review of how the required work could possibly be shared with other sports facilities in the Division to achieve efficiencies.

Community and Events

26. Heath Hands volunteering in Highgate Wood is steadily increasing; a trend that we are very keen to promote. For the first time, two additional summer sessions were programmed in June and July this year, with the volunteers cutting back holly as well as opening up an area for the Wild Learning education group to use for their activities at the same time. Heath Hands were back for two weeks in September, working in four of the conservation areas, including clearing around the pond and around young trees in the 2007 area, and trimming down growth on the historical earthwork. There are another two weekly sessions planned from October through to December, and further sessions for 2015. The volunteers clearly enjoy the woodland environment and their labours are greatly appreciated.



Figure 3: Heath Hands group

27. April through to July was a very busy period this year, with the programme of community and education focused events, and additional licenced activities. The electronic logger data indicates that we had a very busy April, with 9600 visits to the play facility, only surpassed by the 11000 visitor numbers in August. Heritage Day this year attracted around 2,000 visitors, although the general impression was of a steady stream of visitors passing through and spending perhaps an hour or two at most at the event. The main attractions were the dog show, organised by the local veterinary practise, and the 'Monkey Do' woodland play installation. The event also provided a valuable opportunity for local community groups to promote their work and to network.
28. There is a marked increase in licenced activities in Highgate Wood this year, with two educational organisations now running regular sessions through the spring and summer and also in the autumn. These activities generate useful

income and raise the educational profile of the site, as well as promoting its importance as a semi-natural environment in an urban landscape. However there is of course a trade-off, in that even relatively small numbers of people (especially very active 4-year-olds) have an impact on woodland environments, especially Ancient Woodland. We will have to monitor the impact of these activities and identify ways to mitigate compaction and disturbance.

Pavilion Café update

29. The Pavilion Café enjoyed a busy summer season with the warm dry weather, and the extended mild weather this autumn has also assisted the facility's income figures.
30. The proprietor introduced the trial dog friendly areas on the terrace, and also included a single table in the covered area to provide a sheltered place to sit during wet weather. The arrangements have been welcomed by the dog-walking community and we would welcome the Committee's decision on whether or not this arrangement could be made permanent.



Figure 4: New signage at the Pavilion Café for dog owner

31. The customer satisfaction survey was carried out from May through to August this year, giving useful feedback on the facility, and has helpfully provided a number of suggestions that the Superintendent will be reviewing with the tenant to see how they can be implemented to enhance the service.

Development issues

32. The proposed redevelopment of the Haringey Magistrates Court has caused widespread concern in the surrounding residential area, with anxiety expressed over the scale and height of the development. While the City of

London supports the principle of providing additional community housing in the area, there is concern over the impact a building of this scale and stature will have on the southern sector of Highgate Wood and its resident fauna, in particular the bat population. The Highgate Wood Manager lodged an objection to the proposed scheme on Haringey's Planning Portal on these grounds. The Superintendent has also submitted a detailed representation regarding the impact that the proposed development will have on the appearance and character of the conservation area and the Metropolitan Open Land.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

33. 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

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

Conclusion

35. The Team has had a challenging summer season, and can now hopefully focus on the forthcoming autumn and winter period and the seasonal works that are allocated to this time of the year, particularly woodland management and other tree work. There is still residual storm damage work to be done from last October, and conservation work to be carried out in several of the conservation areas. We hope that we escape the violent storms of October 2013, and have a quieter autumn and winter season.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1 – The Roman Kiln Project: Gateway 1 and 2 stages**
- **Appendix 2 – Draft Display Plan for exhibiting the Roman Kiln**

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