

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee	22 April 2015
<b>Subject:</b> Superintendent's update for April 2015	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	<b>For Information</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 cost saving and income generation, sustainability, conservation and woodland management, infrastructure and facilities. The report also includes a summary of progress on objectives in the Conservation Management Plan. As well as information on progress with The Roman Kiln Project and new signage and interpretation which is part of the work around the 'New identity' Project.

### Recommendations

- Members are asked to note 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 June 2015.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. The Highgate Wood Team has had a productive winter, with some disruption to operational work due to bad weather, including several site closures due to high winds and rain. It has also been another wet but relatively mild winter which has caused some cancellations of sport fixtures due to waterlogging on the main field. There is a new impetus to push forward with the Roman Kiln Project and complete the Heritage Lottery Fund Application. Income is incrementally increasing with more licenced events through the winter months as well as an increase in charges for the sport activities. The Café have made a number of improvements to the internal serving area and the external dog friendly area has been a major success. There is promising progress with achieving the objectives laid out in the Conservation Management Plan in a number of areas and Heath Hands volunteers sessions continue to grow in popularity. This year there will be a growing focus on making savings and keeping costs down, especially staffing. This is going to present some major

challenges when the summer season begins and the opening hours extend to their maximum.

### **Budget – progress on the Strategic Based Review**

2. Licenced events continued through the autumn and winter months providing useful additional income. There is an additional environmental education activity this year which started running activities in January. There is capacity to accommodate other activities but due consideration has to be given to the impact these regular activities have on the woodland. This will be referred to later on in this report with the growing realisation that increasing visitor numbers and additional activities are having a negative impact on the woodland component of the site.
3. Budget spend this year has been very carefully monitored. There has been a special focus on identifying ways of improving the service by working proactively with other teams on Hampstead Heath and also the Heath Constabulary. The Team are having to make changes in the way in which they work and the forthcoming season will bring some significant challenges with providing adequate staffing cover while having to make significant reductions in overtime and additional staffing costs. In principal with planned casual staff provision the Team should be able to provide adequate staffing provision but there will be occasions where arrangements have to be made at very short notice due to unplanned absence.
4. Highgate Wood is in a different position from the rest of the Division in that it has already made a 12.5% saving when the Team was reduced to 6 permanent staff from 7, in April 2014. Part of that process involved a team restructure which resulted in the two Play Area Attendants being incorporated into the Wood Keeper roster and taking on the role of locking and unlocking the site. The roster has gone through a series of revisions to improve the provision of cover and also provide an adequate work/life balance especially in the summer months.
5. The coming summer season will present new challenges to the Team. The key factor is to plan ahead and try to anticipate as far in advance as possible the periods of high visitor numbers and the requirement to draft in extra staff resource. It is important to realise also that the other Divisional Teams will be going through the same exercise of reducing costs, which will require careful prioritisation.

### **Roman Kiln Project**

6. Work is now underway to gather all the supporting documents that have to be submitted with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application. Letters of support need to be obtained from local schools, The Museum of London and Bruce Castle Museum. There are also several key individuals, who form part of the Roman Kiln Project Working Group who we hope will also be able to provide letters of support, including a number of people who worked on the original archaeological excavations that uncovered the kilns and pottery in the late 1960's.

7. In order to progress the Project and submit the application later this summer the Highgate Wood Manager has commissioned the small consultancy who produced the Interpretation and Display Plans for the reconfigured education building to help with assembling and submitting the HLF application. Continuing with the same consultancy will enable the project to move to the application stage without losing continuity and the detailed knowledge that they already have on the Project.
8. It is very encouraging that the Project has received so much local and wider support from a number of different organisations and individuals, and it is hoped that the 'Our Heritage' Funding Application will be approved and the Project can be completed.

## **Sustainability**

9. Highgate Wood continues to promote sustainability across all areas including encouraging the Pavilion Café to recycle all their waste materials. There are three 700 litre recycling containers which are collected weekly by the Hampstead Heath Waste and Recycling Team, and then stored for removal from Kenwood Yard.
10. The general waste continues to be removed by the City of London's term waste contractor Amey, and taken for disposal at Walbrook Wharf. The waste material is unloaded into barges at Walbrook Wharf and then shipped up river to an incineration plant at Belvedere, where the material is burnt to generate energy.
11. The photo-voltaic installation on the machine shed has now produced well over 5,000 kilowatt hours in electricity which has made a significant difference in National Grid power consumption, and helped greatly to reduce Highgate Wood's electricity usage. We will be looking at the possibilities of installing a further photo voltaic system on the office roof which, would be smaller than the machine shed but, would provide enough power to run the two personal computers and other electrical appliances.
12. The Open Spaces Department has recently launched its Sustainability Improvement Plan 2015-2017, focusing on three actions. There will be an increased focus on driving down energy and water usage, a department wide review and rationalisation of vehicle and machinery use, and a programme of delivering further Solar Power Projects or other sustainable energy technologies. This will link up with a department wide cost saving and income generation drive. Highgate Wood will be contributing to the Plan and will be working with Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park to draft and implement a local Improvement Plan to achieve the three actions set out in the Department's Improvement Plan.

## **Conservation Management Plan progress**

13. Under the Heritage section objectives there have been some significant progress on the Roman Kiln Project, already mentioned above. There has also been some additional work carried out to protect an important section of the double earthwork structure close to the Memorial Fountain which is suffering from increased footfall and erosion. It is really important to continue

to look for opportunities to investigate the numerous wood banks and large double ditch and bank structure whose purpose and origin continue to be a mystery.

14. A member of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee joined the Highgate Wood Manager to view a recent LIDAR survey of Highgate Wood and Queen's Wood in the City Surveyors Department in the Guildhall on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015. While the images were extremely interesting the definition of the survey is not sufficiently detailed to be of any real value. The Highgate Wood Manager happened to attend a fascinating presentation on local geology at the Friends of Queen's Park Annual General Meeting on the same day and was able to show the images to the geologist.
15. Under the Natural Environment objectives, there has also been promising progress, with a new survey started on natural oak regeneration and existing recent planting. There is more information on this work later on in this report. Other areas of progress are working more closely with the Forestry Commission and also the Conservation Team in Haringey on various projects centred around woodland management.
16. Under Community and Recreation there has been excellent progress with increasing Heath Hands Volunteers sessions in the Wood, and building a core group of committed volunteers who's work focuses on specific management issues referenced in the Conservation Management Plan. The Team have also embarked on a programme of improving and updating the signage around the site, and introducing the 'New Identity' format for presenting information to the public. This will include new maps to replace the older now fading maps posted at the main noticeboards, and also a series of themed information boards displayed at the Education Building.

### **Woodland Conservation and Tree Management**

17. Work continues with Heath Hands Volunteers to construct dead hedging around sensitive areas where there has been significant compaction, and encourage natural regeneration and soil remediation. The dead hedging provides useful habitat for ground nesting birds, and also has the additional advantage of containing the natural leaf litter layer and arresting erosion. There have been 8 volunteer sessions since early December and the all have been well attended, with a member of the Highgate Wood Team supervising each session.
18. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> March Highgate Wood hosted a meeting of the England Woodland Biodiversity Group (EWBG). This group co-ordinates implementation of the woodland sector of the England Biodiversity Strategy and the Habitat Action Plans for Native Woodland in England. EWBG is made up of a broad cross section of the Biodiversity and woodland sector, and includes representatives from the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, and Natural England. The group is currently engaged in developing a woodland survey protocol for assessing the condition of woodland, which will be used to measure the delivery of the Governments Biodiversity Strategy 2020. This Strategy makes a commitment to 'restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems as a contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation'. A significant part of this will be woodland habitat.

19. The EWBG approached the Highgate Wood Manager through the London office of the Forestry Commission, seeking an Ancient Woodland site in the London area within short walking distance of public transport links. The day proved to be very useful for the Highgate Wood Team as the EWBG carried out a field exercise to test out the draft woodland assessment form. The group split into three separate groups and surveyed a series of random plots within the woodland. The results and feedback from the group were broadly similar and very revealing through not necessarily surprising. Highgate Wood has two important issues to resolve; firstly the sheer number of users is causing increasing erosion and fragmentation of the remaining woodland understory, and significantly reducing natural regeneration. The second factor is linked directly to the first, and concerns the progressive change of the woodland to a high forest canopy, caused principally by the 'overstood' hornbeam coppice. The net result is low light levels, and consequently very low natural regeneration.



**Figure 1: Erosion of understory and compaction**

20. These two factors are shared with many other woodland sites and the comments come as no surprise to the Highgate Wood Team. The fact that this message came from a group of very experienced and knowledgeable professionals perhaps made it all the more powerful. It is hoped that the link with the EWBG can be developed and perhaps could provide further guidance on the long term management of the site and ensuring the continuity of the woodland. In simple terms the answer is to increase the size of future conservation areas significantly and possibly prevent access for longer periods. Convincing Highgate Wood's many users that this is the only way to guarantee the continuity of the site may not be easy.
21. Highgate Wood has introduced a severe weather protocol to deal with the threat of high winds and heavy rain. The protocol relies heavily on an increasingly accurate weather forecasting service provided by the

Meteorological Office, which allows the Team to operate a 24 hour warning notice to the public that the Wood may be closed if winds speed becomes potentially dangerous. The threshold is 40mph, and if the forecast predicts winds, and more importantly gusts, of more than 40mph, the Team can then plan for a possible closure. This protocol has been tested and the Wood has now been closed on three occasions over the last four months, once in October and twice very recently at the end of March. On all three occasions the forecasted severe weather did occur and there was significant tree damage.

### **Oak decline and oak regeneration**

22. In the last report submitted in November 2014 there was mention of a new survey of natural oak regeneration and also monitoring of the small population of young planted oaks. This field work for this survey started in late 2014 and continued through the winter months. This is intended to compliment the extensive work already achieved capturing the decline of the oak population on site. A Highgate Wood Keeper carried out the surveying work and the senior Ecologist for Hampstead Heath provided support in downloading and processing all the GPS data collected, and then mapping the surveyed trees (see figure 2).
23. This work is an important step towards trying to measure how the Wood is regenerating and also may indicate what changes we need to make in future management. There is already a reference above to the growing pressures that the site faces because of visitor and all the various activities that take place on the site. The visitor logger devices are recording increased number of visitors. The team have calculated that the number of people visiting the site between January 2014 and January 2014 has now risen to 1,019,414. This is a significant but not surprising finding as in the previous report in April 2014 we recorded a figure approaching 900,000.
24. This information will be used to convey to the public the vulnerability of the woodland habitat and the importance of creating the conservation areas in order to allow areas to regenerate naturally and ensure that the site continues to thrive and provide a haven for both people and the wildlife population.

### **Tree disease and biosecurity issues**

25. Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) is advancing ever nearer and may well get as far as Hampstead Heath this coming summer. The caterpillar has been found in several locations in Regent's Park, and is also present a few kilometres to the west in Brent Park just off the North Circular. The Division now has an Action Plan for OPM which has been circulated to all the sites and a number of staff have been on training days organised by the Forestry Commission. In the autumn of 2014 an additional London wide survey was carried out to identify how far the pest had spread over the 2014 season and how effective the eradication programme had been. The results are shown in figure 3.



Figure 2: 97 plotted young seedling oaks

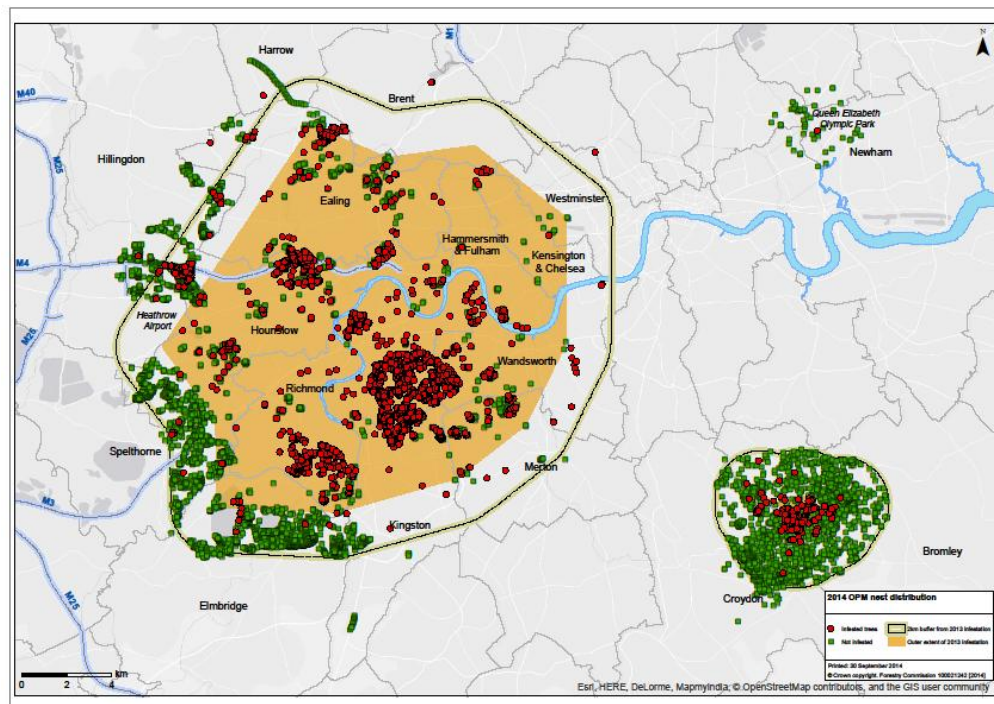


Figure 3: Red dots are confirmed OPM sites and green were clear of OPM

## **Play area and Recreation**

26. The play area continues to be very popular and has increasing visitor numbers corresponding with the increasing visitors to the Wood. The tiger mulch surface in the main section of the play area has been a great success and is achieving the staff time savings for which it was intended. There are some additional repairs to be made to some of the older equipment, including the wooden shelter, but there should be no requirement to make any substantial investment this financial year.
27. The sports field is gradually recovering from the wet winter months and starting to dry out, although there are some drainage issues to be resolved before the cricket season gets underway. As a result of the inclement weather several football matches had to be cancelled. The Teams have all managed to complete their fixtures quota for the season, so there was no requirement to reimburse any of the bookings.

The Highgate Wood Team had to reinstall and construct more wooden boardwalks sections for the bottom part of the sport's field behind the practice cricket nets so members of the public could access that area for walking and running. This area will need to be inspected every winter due to poor drainage, it being the lowest part of the field.
28. Spring signifies the coming of summer and so the cricket preparations have begun in earnest. The cricket table has had its first few cuts of the year which also helps with early rolling. The markings for the cricket squares are all set out. One of the operations that needs to be re-considered is the requirement to hand weed the cricket square; a task that takes a great deal of staff time and is very labour intensive. The alternative is to use chemicals, not necessarily ideal for the woodland environment but a method that the Team will have to consider in the near future, as was utilised in the past. Clearly this will need to be carefully considered and it may be possible to use other methods to reduce the growth of weeds on the square.
29. The cricket score hut has been refurbished with a new fascia to replace the original unit which had been repeatedly repaired but had finally come to the end of its service life. The field and cricket square have just had their covering of spring / summer fertilizer which will encourage good vigorous green growth.
30. The children's football coaching has now begun (Easter holidays) and will continue for each school holiday and the six weeks of summer. The trim trail items are inspected on a weekly basis and are proving to be very popular with the members of public.

## **Pavilion Café update**

31. The Pavilion Café has had a reasonable winter. The current lease holder has used the quiet trading period to make a series of improvements to both the internal serving area and also carried out a spring clean of the storage area next to the compactor. One of the metal storage containers used by the Café has been removed and this has released additional storage space for the Team to relocate the recycling bins and some of the other items that were previously left next to the access road. The overall appearance of the area is

greatly improved and the intention now is to bring this area back into woodland.

32. The period of 'soft market testing' has been extended due to a delay in commencing the Project and this will now extend into the early summer before the process develops into a tendering exercise. It is assumed that the present lease holder will express an interest in continuing to manage the facility.

### **Community and Events**

33. There has been a significant increase in staff time devoted towards education activities, partly due to the increased number of licenced events that are taking place in Highgate Wood. The number of people attending the various fixtures dropped slightly; this year a total of 2,266 attended educational based activities mostly school groups and other licenced activities. The numbers attending the public walks, events, and volunteer activities was 945, also a small drop on last year. The reduction in numbers are very small and were probably due to the less clement weather over the summer.
34. The diarised events over the winter and early spring have been very well attended and another interesting programme is already being advertised for the forthcoming year. Highgate Wood's Heritage Day Event has been renamed 'Community Day' and will be held on the 6<sup>th</sup> September this year. Some of the activities will be scaled down at this year's event to reflect the requirement to reduce costs. The event was always intended to be and will remain for the local community and provide an opportunity to promote understanding and support for local woodland and it's conservation, and of course the Local Community Groups who work so hard to do this.

### **Infrastructure and buildings**

35. A Team will be staring work after Easter to carry out repairs to the main pathways, which should make a major difference to the quality of the surface. These works are simply to restore the bound gravel surfaces and should not take too long to complete. The City Surveyors have also contracted in a fencing company to make a number of repairs to the existing fencing, including a new layout at Onslow gate entrance (see figure 4) that allows vehicles to park inside the Wood when entering the site from the road. This new arrangement allows pedestrians adequate room to pass on the pavement and prevents longer vehicles form protruding out into the road.
36. The office has had a new boiler installed and this is now working well, after a period of teething problems with the circulation system and some of the radiators.



**Figure 4: New layout at Onslow Gate**

### **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 Highgate Wood Team faces some significant challenges this coming year, and the period up to 2018. The combination of financial constraints and the expectation to continue to deliver a high quality community focused service will require some careful management. The Conservation Management Plan may be a useful tool in supporting change as there is recognition that the continuity of the site's natural fabric is paramount and the City of London have a legal duty under the foundation legislation to preserve the character of the woodland and conserve it for future generations. However, there is also the commitment to allow open access to the public. The real question is how to make the public understand the vulnerability of the

woodland environment and to accept that in order to conserve it for the future larger parts of it may have to have restricted access.

### **Appendices**

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