

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	10 June 2015 20 July 2015
<b>Subject:</b> Superintendent's Update Report Queen's Park – June 2015	<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 Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group on the operational and management activities, including the achievements and good work of the Queen's Park Team since the last update report in November 2014.

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. It also discusses income generation and cost-saving initiatives, including sustainability in the Park and licensed events.

### Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.
- That the views of the Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group be conveyed to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. Queen's Park continues to be a well-used and much loved Victorian park. Located within the Queen's Park Ward in the London Borough of Brent (LBB), it provides valuable green space for the enjoyment, leisure and well-being of the local community and London as a whole.
2. During the period from April 2014 to March 2015, the Park received 1,100,000 visits. The Children's Farm received 124,489 visits and the Children's Play Area 232,165 visits.
3. Pedestrian counters continue to be used at the Park gates and at its facilities, to monitor visitor numbers. The figures are collated on a monthly basis by staff, not only allowing the Manager and Supervisor to predict when the busy periods may be but also demonstrating, via its usage, the importance of this Open Space for the health and well-being of the community and wider London.

## Current Position

### *Budget – Progress on the Service Based Review*

4. By the 2017/18 Financial Year, the City of London Corporation's Open Spaces Department will be required to find £2.2m of savings, with £332,000 of savings identified across Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park in 2015/16.
5. Savings and transformed changes are being addressed through eleven programmes that focus on the following areas: learning, sports, the Ponds Project, Various Powers Bill, promotion of services, energy efficiency, fleet and equipment, wayleaves, commercial rent of lodges, car parks, and cafés. Project Boards have now been set up for each of these programmes.
6. The Queen's Park Manager is involved with a number of the projects and has provided Opportunity Outlines for the learning, sports, and café programmes. An Opportunity Outline is used to scope out new ideas and highlight issues, so that it's clear what the proposal opportunity or problem to be solved. This enables the Senior Leadership Team to take an informed decision as to whether to commit to further development of the opportunity.
7. The Manager is making progress with the licensing of commercial activities in the Park, discussions and meetings having taken place with the Comptroller & City Solicitor and the City Surveyors Departments. Meetings will shortly commence with those groups that either currently operate commercial activities in the Park, or wish to do so.
8. Licensed events – for example, 'The Nomad' outdoor cinema – provide useful additional income. The management of licensed events needs to be handled appropriately, taking into consideration the impact they may have on the Park and its users.
9. There has been a focus on how we can share our resources and use the resources of others across the Division/Department. For example, our Animal Attendant has been providing additional support to the staff at the Golders Hill Park Zoo and our grass-cutting machinery has been shared with another site in the Division, while the skills and knowledge of a colleague from Hampstead Heath continue to guide our turf maintenance in the Quiet Garden and Pitch & Putt course. We have placed particular emphasis on identifying ways of improving the service by working proactively with other Teams on projects across the Division.
10. The Team has had to make changes in the way it works and this will bring some significant challenges, such as providing adequate staffing cover while making significant reductions in the Division's overtime and additional staffing costs. In principle, with the planned use of casual staff, the Team should be able to provide sufficient staffing cover, although arrangements will occasionally have to be made at very short notice, due to unplanned absence.

11. 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 need for a larger 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.

## **Ecology and Environment**

12. The Open Spaces Department has recently launched its Sustainability Improvement Plan 2015-2017, which focusses on three actions: 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.
13. The London Borough of Brent (LBB) is no longer in a position to remove green waste from Queen's Park, having reduced the number of vehicles in their fleet that managed this operation. The Park Supervisor is working with colleagues to review the removal of green waste from Queen's Park. Consideration will be given to the most environmentally sustainable, cost-effective and efficient process to achieve this. The service offered by the LBB was at no cost to the City of London.
14. One of the Hampstead Heath ecologists has taught two members of the Queen's Park Team the technique of hedge laying. Under the ecologist's guidance, Queen's Park staff completed a section of hedge laying in the Woodland Walk.
15. Hedge laying is a traditional method of hedge management and has been practised for hundreds of years. It involves cutting nearly all the way through the base of the stems, then laying them over at an angle of about 35 degrees. The cut stems, called pleachers, are tucked tightly together, staked vertically and bound horizontally for strength to produce a strong hedge. The hedge layer uses an array of axes and billhooks, and will normally stake and bind the hedge with hazel. The benefits of using this time-honoured method is to help rejuvenate an ageing hedgerow by encouraging it to put on new growth, as well as helping to improve its overall structure and strength, guarding against soil erosion, and providing a valuable wildlife habitat and corridor.
16. General waste continues to be removed from Queen's Park by the City of London Corporation's preferred contractor (Amey). When removed from site, it is taken to Walbrook Wharf in the City, then shipped along the Thames and taken for incineration at Belvedere in Bexley, where the material is burnt for energy.

## **Sports and Recreation**

17. The hedge to the north of the tennis courts was reduced by one metre, a task that was carried out by Queen's Park staff. During the autumn/winter of 2015, a contractor will be used to reduce the height of the hedges on the remaining three sides of the tennis courts. This contractor will also be used to assist with other maintenance tasks that cannot be carried out by staff on site.

18. All six tennis courts were cleaned with a jet wash and treated for moss/weeds in the spring of 2015, as was the perimeter of the paddling pool. One court (court 6) is currently out of use, due to its poor state of repair. The City Surveyors are using currently external contractor, who is currently surveying the condition of all six courts, after which the Surveyors Department will obtain quotations for the necessary repairs and maintenance of all six courts.
19. From March 2014 to April 2015, gross income from the tennis courts was £22,000 and £24,946 came from the Pitch & Putt course, giving a combined gross income of £46,946. During this period, 7,500 games of tennis were sold and 6,388 games of Pitch & Putt.
20. To promote the City of London tennis coaching courses on offer, banners have been placed in and around the tennis courts. Information about the booking of courses has also been made available on the Queen's Park web page [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/queenspark](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/queenspark).
21. The Park Manager will be meeting with a representative from Brent Council in June 2015 to consider the possibility of installing outdoor gym equipment in Queen's Park. This proposal would be dependent upon available funding. Should we decide to proceed with this, consideration will also be given to the maintenance and upkeep of this equipment. At its meeting on 18 May 2015 the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee noted the resolution of the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee that decisions on equipment funding offers should be made by the respective Management Committee, based on the principle that any offer should be self-funding for the lifetime of the equipment.

### **Conservation and Heritage**

22. The Green Flag/Green Heritage judging will take place on 28 May 2015. In preparation for this, we are continuing to maintain the Park and its facilities to a high standard.
23. The Park has entered the London in Bloom Awards. Judging for this event will take place in June/July 2015 (date TBC). London in Bloom celebrates and recognises the passion Londoners have for greening our capital city.

### **Children's Play Area**

24. Repairs have been carried out to items of play equipment in the sandpit area. The works have included staff giving items of equipment a new coat of paint and repairs being completed by a contractor.
25. A project will be undertaken this year to repair or replace the wet-pour surface around the perimeter of the sandpit. Some areas of this surface are in a poor state of repair and this has been identified by a RoSPA inspection as a medium risk.

## **Landscape Management**

26. The Hampstead Heath Arboricultural Team is currently checking the oak trees within the Park each week for the presence of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) caterpillar. The caterpillars would potentially be feeding on the young oak foliage, until they build nests before pupating in late July. To our knowledge, there are so far no OPMs in the Park.
27. Massaria continues to be a significant issue on the London plane trees across the Park. Recently the Arboricultural Team removed seven dead branches affected by the disease from three mature trees.
28. The Team will shortly be removing a declining Horse Chestnut on the western edge of the main field. This tree is affected by Horse Chestnut leaf miner (*Cameraria ohridella*) and Horse Chestnut bleeding canker. Between them, this pest and disease are shutting down the tree's vascular system, which will sadly lead to the demise of the tree.

## **Operational Management**

29. A separate report has been submitted to this Committee, proposing that the Queen's Park Bandstand be used for Weddings and Civil Partnership Ceremonies. Informal requests have already been made to the Park for this structure to be used for such Ceremonies.
30. The Bandstand continues to be used for parties, mainly for children. In 2014 we took 27 confirmed bookings, which generated a gross income of £1,485.00. We continue to charge £55.00 for a two-hour slot, either in the morning or the afternoon. We provide a number of tables and chairs for these events.
31. A donation post has been installed in the Children's Farm, which to date has raised in excess of £500.00. Consideration is being given to the installation of a donation post in the Children's Play Area, close to the paddling pool entrance.
32. New bins have been installed in the Park (21 in total). These bins are a traditional Victoriana style and are made from a polymer material, which requires little maintenance. They are larger in capacity (100 litres) than the previous cast iron bins, which have now been removed from site. We will review the usage of the new bins over the summer period and, if necessary, we will consider adding additional bins to support the collection of waste in the Park. The recycling of the cast iron bins will generate an income, which can be reinvested in the Park.
33. Seven granite bases have been installed opposite the Bandstand. These have been designed to complement the commemorative benches that sit upon them and to reduce the erosion beneath the benches, which was due to their location on the edge of the turf. These works were carried out by an external contractor and funded from the Local Risk Budget.

34. The Park has supported a number of work experience pupils in recent months. The students come from the Westminster College and have assisted members of the Team with low-level tasks, such as leaf and weed clearance in the Quiet Garden and the Children's Farm. They will continue to attend the Park until the end of the summer term.
35. The Park has supported a local student who has completed an element of her Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. She assisted in the Children's Farm for a ten-week period.
36. During the winter of 2014, 240 children from the Malorees School assisted staff with the planting of 5,000 daffodil bulbs in the Park, mainly across the bunds at the southern end of the main field. The planting of the bulbs has led to numerous positive comments from Park users about the wonderful colour displayed in the spring of 2015.
37. Two new wooden planters have been placed outside the Café in the Park. The planters were obtained, at no cost to the Park, from Parliament Hill as they were unwanted there. Each has been planted with ornamental willow and will be replanted with summer bedding at the end of May 2015.
38. New turf has been laid in the Children's Farm in the goat enclosure and rabbit pens. A new planting scheme has also been introduced in the Children's Farm around the pond. We propose to use two of the central enclosures in the Farm to create a new exhibit. One of the enclosures is currently empty and the other houses chickens, which can be moved to another enclosure within the Farm. We will then remove the dividing fence to create one large enclosure, which will house some ouessant sheep –, these are the smallest breed of sheep, with fully grown males being 19 inches from foot to shoulder fully grown and females being slightly smaller. As sheep are a domesticated breed, they will not change our status or require a zoo licence. We will just need to add them to our current CPH no. (County Parish Holding) number with DEFRA, which we already have for the goats. We have been advised that the proposed enclosure is big enough to house two females and one male initially, with scope to breed for a couple of seasons while keeping the offspring and then, if we continue to breed, moving the offspring on to other collections. The ouessant sheep will be a great addition to the Farm, creating more of a farm feel, and will develop more opportunities for education. The Animal Attendant has spoken with other collections, who have confirmed and it has been made clear that the sheep are low maintenance to keep. As and as there are no other collections with them in or around London, they are I'm sure they will be popular with visitors.
39. To reduce the cost of employing an external contractor, the staff have completed minor painting tasks, including painting in the Lych Gate, toilet doors, interior fencing, and the bases of the finger posts.
40. As part of the Additional Works Programme, exterior fencing panels were painted along Kingswood Avenue in the autumn of 2014. Repair works are currently being carried out on the notice boards at the entrances to the Park.

## Visitors and Community

41. Discussions had started with a member of the local community, to support the development of a volunteer group in Queen's Park. Unfortunately this individual has now moved away from the area. An objective during 2015 will be to develop a volunteer group that can support the Team with maintenance and projects in the Park.
42. Queen's Park Day will take place on 13 September 2015. The Park Manager will work closely with the event organisers, the Queen's Park Area Residents' Association, to ensure this event continues to be a successful community event.
43. The Park will facilitate four outdoor film screenings in August and September, which will take place on the following dates;
  - 15 August 2015 – Labyrinth
  - 22 August 2015 – The Princess Bride
  - 19 September 2015 – Little Miss Sunshine
  - 26 September 2015 – Withnail and I
44. The Park Manager is in discussion with the 'The Nomad' outdoor cinema to support an event at Christmas in the Park. This event may include showing a film in the Park under cover.
45. In 2013 Queen's Park Area Residents' Association celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary by planting a commemorative tree in Queen's Park. Although the group is now 42 years old, they took the opportunity to plant the wild service tree in the Park, marking their achievement with a plaque.
46. Over the Whitsun Bank Holiday weekend, there will be a small number of children's fairground rides on the main field. These rides will be open from 11am to 6pm from Friday 22 May until Tuesday 26 May.
47. A variety of bands will be performing on the Bandstand during the year. We currently pay for most of the bands to perform there, although we do seek local groups to come and perform free of charge. We have had a number of enquiries from local groups keen to perform, which are currently being followed up.
48. A variation to the entertainment licence will be applied for, which will allow the sale and consumption of alcohol in the Park at events exceeding the attendance limit of a Temporary Event Notice (the limit of a TEN including staff is 499).
49. Ten entertainment shows for children have been arranged and will take place during August 2015. These shows will occur on Wednesdays and Fridays, and will continue to take place in the Field of Hope, at no cost to our visitors. Flyers and posters will be produced promoting these events.
50. Transition Towns, Kensal to Kilburn continue to maintain the vegetable garden at the rear of the café. In March 2015, they supported the 'Big Dig' event and had twelve volunteers preparing the vegetable garden for the new growing season.

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

51. This report will help fulfil the City of London Corporation's Corporate Plan 2015-19; *to provide valued services, such as education, employment, culture and leisure, to London and the nation.* The report also meets the Department's Strategic Goals and Objectives; *Protect and conserve the ecology, biodiversity and heritage of our sites, Embed financial sustainability across our activities by delivering identified programmes and projects, Enrich the lives of Londoners by providing high quality and engaging educational and volunteering opportunities, Improve the health and wellbeing of community through access to green space and recreation.* The report also contributes to the Departmental values of *quality, inclusion, environment, promotion and people.*

## Implications

52. **Financial** – There are no financial implications arising from this report. The operational requirements highlighted in this report would come from the Queen's Park Local Risk Budget.

53. **Legal** – There are no legal risks associated with this report.

54. **HR** – There are no HR implications associated with this report.

55. **Property** – There are no property implications associated with this report.

## Conclusion

56. Challenges will be faced over the coming year by the Queen's Park Team. Staff will need to work with the Divisional and Departmental Management Teams to ensure they achieve the identified savings, promote the services offered, and seek to work differently, continuing to deliver high quality services and facilities in Queen's Park. Projects delivered under the Service-Based Review present an ambitious programme of change, during which we will continue to deliver our Divisional and Departmental objectives, efficiently and effectively ensuring the services offered by Queen's Park and the Open Spaces Department remain sustainable.

## Appendices

None

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