

Committees	Dated:
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee – For Discussion	9 November 2015
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen’s Park Committee – For Decision	23 November 2015
Subject:	Public
Review of Annual Work Programme 2015	
Report of:	For Discussion
Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	

Summary

This report reviews the management operations and activities carried out on Hampstead Heath over the past 12 months as part of the 2015 Annual Work Programme, and considers the new 2016 Annual Work Programme appended to this report.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that:

- Members note the work undertaken during 2015 to enhance the natural aspect and designed landscapes within the Heath.
- The views of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee be conveyed to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen’s Park Committee at their November meeting.
- The Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen’s Park Committee agree the proposed 2016 Annual Work Programme.

Main Report

Background

1. Hampstead Heath is a complex mosaic of different habitats, comprising extensive areas of grassland, secondary woodland, hedgerows, water bodies, streams, a raised bog, heathland and formal areas. It is also extremely popular and well used by the public. All these factors contribute to the complexity of managing the site.
2. Policy 6 of the Interim Management Policy Plan for the Heath states that the City will draw up an Annual Work Programme (AWP) for the Heath, in consultation with local groups and interested parties. This Programme will reflect the primary objective set out in the Mission Statement and will broadly cover planned conservation operations, including vegetation, pond and wetland management, tree work, footpath maintenance and fencing works.
3. For completeness, the major tasks required within the formal areas of the Heath have also been included within the AWP.

Review of the 2015 Annual Work Programme

Tree Management

4. 2015 was a challenging year for the Tree Team, with the discovery in June of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) at both Queen's Park and Hampstead Heath, followed by an intense period of surveying to try to find all the affected trees and resident moth larvae before they pupated. The Team also had to attend to core tree inspection work and numerous other duties, including work relating to the Ponds Project.

Biosecurity and tree disease issues

5. With the discovery of OPM in June, first at Queen's Park then ten days later at Hampstead Heath, there was a flurry of activity to locate all the caterpillar nests before they had a chance to spread further. The infestation at Queen's Park proved to be very localised, with just two trees affected. With the help of the Forestry Commission, the other oaks in the Park were surveyed and arrangements made to remove the nests, using a specialist contractor.
6. The situation at Hampstead Heath was considerably more complicated, with clusters of trees affected near the Mixed Pond and Parliament Hill, plus several other isolated trees. By mid-July fifteen nests had been identified and two additional nests found within the Kenwood Estate. Forestry Commission surveyors were on site for nearly a month over the June and July period, supported by the Tree Team who also found a number of nests themselves, including a cluster around the Parliament Hill bandstand and tennis courts. All trees affected were cordoned off, due to the risk of contact for both people and dogs. It is suspected that the moths may have come from infested trees in Regent's Park.
7. The Tree Team Supervisor coordinated the removal of the nests, using the contractor that had dealt with the Queen's Park outbreak, and all the nests were removed by mid-July. The outbreaks at Queen's Park and Hampstead Heath have been a very useful learning experience for everyone concerned; it is hoped that the spraying operations next spring will contain the spread, although it is still early days and the results will not be known until next summer. Both Queen's Park and Hampstead Heath were issued with Statutory Plant Health Notices, with specific instructions on control measures and biosecurity precautions. All oak arisings are effectively quarantined at both sites until further notice, to reduce the risk of the pest spreading to other neighbouring Open Spaces and gardens.



Figure 1: Cordoned-off oak trees affected by OPM at Parliament Hill

Core work and tree inspections

8. A number of emergency tree works had to be carried out during the year, including several incidents of summer limb drop followed by incidents of branch and root plate failures triggered by the heavy rain and squally weather in mid- to late-July. Massaria continues to occupy a significant amount of the Tree Team's time and this year was no exception, with works continuing to remove infected branches at South End Green and Queen's Park. It is hoped the weather during the latter part of October will not be as stormy as in previous years. The Team has worked on 112 trees to date over the 2015 period and has been involved in various other tree management operations, including tree root investigation work and decay testing.
9. Tree inspections are progressing well and despite the disruption caused by the discovery of OPM, the Team has been able to catch up with the schedule. All inspections have been completed at Golder's Hill Park and we are ahead of last year's situation, having inspected over 1,800 trees since the start of the year.
10. The Tree Team inevitably became involved in works relating to tree protection and access pruning at the start of the Ponds Project. The main task involved crown lifting along the access road to the Highgate Chain of Ponds, as well as works at other locations to reduce the risk of tree strikes.

Nature Conservation Work

11. The early stages of the Ponds Project also saw the Conservation Team deflected off its core work to assist with timber extraction and also helping with the preparation of the BAM Nuttall offices at Kenwood Yard. The Team made up for lost time with an excellent grass-cutting season, making full use of the dry

warm weather that extended into the middle of July. A majority of the other programmed works were also completed, including hedge laying and habitat restoration work at various locations. The restoration of the Whitestone Garden has been a major success this year, with clearance work and replanting all carried out with the help of Heath Hands volunteers.

Ponds Project related works

12. With the Ponds Project tree removal work starting in February this year, the Conservation Team helped remove the larger sections of timber at the Stock Pond and also at Hampstead No 2 Pond, where two large London Planes were felled to allow the construction of the new covered culvert. With ground conditions very wet after rain and snow, the intervention of the Conservation Team significantly reduced ground damage and vehicle movements.
13. The Conservation Team Supervisor arranged for a mobile saw mill to come to Kenwood Yard and process a number of the larger lengths of timber that had been brought up from the Stock Pond. This timber will be used to construct informal bridges in the Fleet Valley, as well as cladding for some of the more prominent concrete structures to be built during the Ponds Project. In total, around three tonnes of oak timber was processed and is currently being stored in the recently built barn extension in Kenwood Yard.



Figure 2: Milling timber from the Ponds Project

Hedgerows and wild flower meadows programme

14. The Team managed to lay a number of sections of hedgerow before the bird-nesting season started, including at a very prominent location opposite the Lido. This work was particularly appreciated by a number of residents in the flats in Lissenden Gardens, as it increased light levels to the gardens and to the

ground- and first-floor flats. This work has added an additional rural touch to the revised landscape layout at the entrance to the Lido with its new wooden fencing and gates. Further work is planned over the winter and early spring to extend the hedge-laying as far as the main entrance. There will be a focus on hedge works on the Heath Extension this autumn, based on the programme of work specified in the Hedgerow Report produced in 2013.



Figure 3: Newly laid hedge outside the Lido

15. There was a concerted effort this year to repair some of the ground damage caused by the National Cross Country event in February. This is always a difficult task, as nothing can be done with machinery until the ground conditions have dried out, which will often be in mid- to late-March or even early April. We had some success in repairing the ground damage, but had to resort to fencing some areas off to allow them to recover.
16. In March and April, works also took place to reseed the two annual wildflower meadows, and a tractor-driven soil inverter (or 'blecavator') was hired in to complete the preparation work while the weather conditions were favourable. Three perennial wildflower meadows were also prepared and sown. By late June/early July, the annual meadows looked spectacular, particularly the area on Duke's Fields near Parliament Hill.



Figure 4: Wild flower meadow creation

Grassland management

17. The Conservation Team had an excellent grass-cutting season with warm dry weather throughout June and into July. Starting the cutting earlier this year allowed the Team to take maximum advantage of the good conditions and the quality of the baled grass was an improvement on previous years. The area cut was just under 10 hectares this year, which was less than last year (13 hectares). The Team was not able to cut the lower section of the Tumulus Field, due to the Ponds Project compound, but the overall collection of 26 tonnes of grass in 80 bales was a very good result under the circumstances.
18. The Team has been grass cutting at Kenwood Estate again this summer, which has generated some useful additional income and strengthened the relationship between the Kenwood Estate and Hampstead Heath. We hope this arrangement can be sustained in future years.

Invasives and woodland secondary management

19. There has been a focus this year on controlling invasives, particularly Japanese Knotweed using a specialist injection kit that optimises the herbicide and removes the need for conventional spraying. Japanese Knotweed continues to be a major problem in London and beyond, with Local Authorities and private land owners alike spending thousands of pounds on its control and disposal. Fortunately the spread of the plant on the Heath is very limited, which is entirely due to the Team's diligence in controlling the little that still persists on the site.

20. The Team has carried out a number of cyclical management works at various locations, removing invasive tree species such as Sycamore and Turkey Oak and coppicing carefully selected areas along the Fleet Valley. This will encourage regeneration and species diversity in these relatively secluded riparian areas which, with careful management, will develop into valuable habitat. There has also been a focus on opening up rides or pathway edges around the Viaduct and Sandy Heath. The work on the Sandy Heath ride has been rewarded with sightings of the Purple Emperor butterfly, which hadn't been seen on the Heath for some years.

Rural Infrastructure maintenance

21. The Conservation Team periodically receives requests to repair some of the wooden bridges across the Heath. This spring works were carried out on the wooden bridge (figure 5) between the cricket field and the rugby pitch on the Heath Extension, which was in poor repair. The Team has also laid a hoggin surface on the informal path at the north-eastern corner of the Heath Extension, as this area becomes waterlogged for long periods during the winter months.



Figure 5: Refurbished timber bridge on the Heath Extension

Working with Heath Hands and Whitestone Garden restoration.

22. There have been a number of additional activities complementing the core AWP, notably the successful restoration of the Whitestone Garden, which began in early spring with an extensive clearance of overgrown shrubs and tree management. There have been a number of well-attended and very productive Heath Hands sessions in the Garden, restoring sections of the pathway and preparing areas for replanting. The overall impact has been remarkable,

opening up the overgrown areas to light and making the garden more visible from the road, but at the same time not compromising its sheltered aspect. Work is now underway to create a water supply for the Garden, so that plants can be kept well-watered and thus hasten their establishment.



Figure 6: New areas for planting out in Whitestone Garden

23. Heath Hands have played a key role in working with the Conservation team on a number of long-term habitat conservation projects, including the heather site above the Vale of Health, and also the gorse compartments on Sandy Heath and the Flagstaff. They have also created new scrapes in sunny locations for invertebrates, such as solitary mining bees and wasps. The volunteers are also mentioned in the section below on Ecological work.

Ecological Work

24. Extensive and detailed input was made to design issues for the restoration of Ponds Project areas. These included amendments to seed mixes and areas to be turfed. Changes were also made to proposed sites for tree planting. While the original proposals included new trees along the eastern edge of the Ladies' Pond meadow, the proposed alternative is to plant eight oak saplings along the line of old field boundaries below the Tumulus. Proposals have also been drawn up to replace ornamental planting at the Ladies' Pond with native wild flowers. The Ecology Team continues to work alongside the Ponds Project contractors to ensure that wildlife and wildlife habitats are protected and, wherever possible, improved. The erection of bat boxes, assistance with fish rescue, as well as reviewing and advising on habitat enhancement schemes, are all ongoing.

25. New areas of perennial wild flowers were established at the Old Hockey Pitch and on the Extension, and annual wild flowers were re-sown at Duke's Field, all funded by the City Bridge Trust (CBT). Wild flower plugs were planted at the entrance to the Heath and Parliament Hill and in Golders Hill Park, also funded by the CBT. Monitoring of the Sparrows wildflower meadow showed that the sward remains stable, with the cover of thistle reduced due to dry weather.
26. The Ecology Team trialled a hedgehog monitoring scheme in Golders Hill Park. The aim was to begin to assess hedgehog populations on the Heath, prompted by hedgehog populations being in national decline. It is anticipated that volunteers will carry out further monitoring during 2016. The surveying involves putting out cardboard shelters, containing sheets of paper with a vegetable ink strip that the hedgehogs walk over as they enter the shelter, leaving their paw prints which allows easy identification. Golders Hill Park has a healthy small population of these rarely seen animals, which came as a surprise.



Figure 7: Hedgehog shelter with paw prints

27. Volunteer Teams have once again been involved in reptile monitoring on Hampstead Heath. The scheme is now just finishing its fifth season, with more than 25 volunteers involved and over 500 snake records made. From these, it appears the population of grass snakes has increased on the Heath.
28. Two 'open sessions' were held in the Bird Sanctuary in June for members of the public to see the abundance of spring flowers and find out how the area is managed. The two short sessions attracted over 200 visitors and comments received were overwhelmingly positive. This was a rare opportunity for the public to have access to one of the most diverse and conservation-rich compartments on Hampstead Heath. It also provided both the Ecologists the chance to showcase some of the normally invisible habitat management work that goes on behind the scenes.



Figure 8: Bird Sanctuary and meadow area

29. A Management Plan was drawn up for the Hampstead Fleet Stream and a report produced on vegetation monitoring over the past eleven years.
30. During the past year, excessive bramble incursion into grassland was reduced by repeatedly cutting it. This has been very successful and it is not generally proposed to make any further substantial reductions.

Formal Areas

31. The Gardening and Sports and Recreation Keeping Teams have had a challenging and creative year in completing approved projects in the 2015 AWP, together with routine general maintenance of the formal areas at Parliament Hill Fields, Golders Hill Park, Heath Extension Sports Areas, the Hill Garden & Pergola, and Keats House.

Golders Hill Park & the Hill Garden

32. This year has seen successful management of the sustainable planting scheme in the Wall Garden. The Park Manager and Head Gardener have liaised with representatives of Westminster City Council and shared good practice.
33. Landscaping of the Eagle Owl enclosure has been completed, as advised by the Zoo Ethics Group.
34. Shrub borders have been replanted following the wall rebuild in the Hill Garden, and the Stumpery further developed and maintained.
35. A Green Wall has been created outside the Butterfly House and Bee Hives successfully introduced in the Deer Pen.

Parliament Hill Fields

36. The planters in front of the café (figure 9) have been replaced using oak timbers and planted with native species that include Cowslip, *Primula veris*, Field Poppy, *Papaver rhoeas*, Hedge Cranesbill, *Geranium pyrenaicum*, Wild Basil, Field heartsease, *Clinopodium vulgare* and *Viola arvensis*.



Figure 9: New oak planters in front of the Parliament Hill Café with new planting scheme

37. Shrub borders have been replanted at the Hive (formerly the football changing rooms) at the Savernake Road entrance (figure 10).



Figure 10: New oak planters in front of the Parliament Hill Café with new planting scheme

38. A wooden cladding design for the concrete bins has been developed, which marks the start of a new project to improve the appearance of the numerous concrete ring bins across the site.

Sports Facilities and Filming Events

39. The Sports and Recreation Keeping Team managed all the winter and summer sports grass pitches to a high standard, including the introduction of a third rugby pitch on the Heath Extension.
40. Up to fifteen separate school sports sessions per week were accommodated from April through to July, including school sports days, Camden Schools Sports Association events, and the Night of the 10,000 metres.
41. More than 100 separate film location shoots were overseen and managed to ensure the Heath's landscape was protected at all times. This included a location shoot for the feature film 'The Danish Girl'.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

42. The preparation and implementation of an AWP in accordance with Policy 6 of the Interim Management Plan contributes to the strategic theme of *A Clean, Pleasant and Attractive City*. Its natural aspect is a significant factor in the popularity of the Heath for general recreation and sport, which also helps contribute towards *A Healthy City*.
43. The actions for the new AWP are set out under the main character areas of the Heath. This follows the format of the proposed Part III section of the Management Plan, with detailed prescriptions of the work. What is ultimately required for each of these character areas is a clear vision on the long-term aspirations for them, together with those policies that are relevant to these areas, which will be taken from the Part I overriding strategic direction and Part II policies for each Topic Area.

Implications

44. The costs of meeting this ambitious programme are funded through the Superintendent's local risk budget. Wherever possible, opportunities will be sought for external funding to support these essential works, while the Management Team will continue to promote and develop opportunities for volunteers.

Conclusion

The Heath is a complex site and it is impossible to set out in full all the work required to manage it a year ahead. Unanticipated circumstances (for example, storms) may require a change of priorities. However, the Programme establishes our intentions for the year, subject to the Committee's comments.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Annual Work Programme 2016.

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