

Committee(s)	Dated:
Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	18 November 2015 23 November 2015
Subject: Highgate Wood – Superintendent's update for November 2015	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Information

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. This report also provides an update on The Roman Kiln Project and new signage and interpretation which is part of the work around the 'New identity' Project.

Recommendation(s)

- That members note the report.
- That members of the Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee provide feedback on the proposed closing time changes, outlined as Options A & B in the 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 November 2015.
- That members of the Hampstead Heath Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee provide feedback on the proposed closing time changes, outlined as Options A & B in the report.

Main Report

Background

1. It has been another busy six month period since April for the Highgate Wood Team. Licenced activities on the site are steadily increasing reflecting the popularity of Forest schools and the general principle of getting children out of the classroom and engaging with the natural world.
2. The sports activities had a relatively good year apart from some disruption due to bad weather later in the summer.
3. Sadly, after a great deal of effort both from the Team and the local community, the Roman Kiln Heritage Lottery application was not successful which, understandably, came as a great disappointment.

4. Heath Hands volunteers have had a good start to their woodland management activities, and the Hampstead Heath Tree Team have provided additional help with various tree works.

Budget update

5. With the requirement to reduce spend and increase income there has been a significant amount of time and effort focused on identifying where these savings can be made and during the last few weeks the new Learning Programme has been released which will radically change the way the Open Spaces Department delivers this service. Although Highgate Wood is not directly involved in the new changes there will still be a requirement to make changes to working patterns and increase income from Licenced Events and Sports Activities.
6. Budget spend this year has been very carefully monitored, with a major reduction in overtime payments, and the greater use of casuals to infill on shifts where staff are off sick or on annual leave. This strategy has been successful and the spend profile has been successfully reduced.
7. Highgate Wood along with the other sites within the Department is subject to a sports provision review carried out by an external Finance and Business Analyst. The work is in process and the objective is to identify the true cost of sports provision and identify where there could be potential opportunities to make significant changes, reduce spend or increase income.
8. Licenced Events continued through the autumn and winter months providing useful additional income. Further details on income are provided below.

Proposed changes to closing times during the summer months.

9. It is proposed to close Highgate Wood earlier during the eight week period starting in late May through to the end of July. This change will have a number of benefits for both the service and the staff. Closing the site at 9.45pm during the height of the summer is often not an easy task, and it is often virtually dark by the time all the gates are secured. Earlier closing would allow staff to lock up when it is still light, reduce Health & Safety issues, and improve the work life balance of staff. There would also be a small saving to the Department in anti-social hours payments.
10. The Manager of Highgate Wood is currently looking at two options. Option A, introducing a closing time of 9.15pm, which would see the Wood closed 30 minutes earlier than the current existing arrangements; Option B, introducing a closing time 9.30pm which would see the Wood closed 15 minutes earlier than the current arrangements. There may be some benefit in adopting a gradual approach to the process to allow the public to adjust to the changed times. It is proposed to introduce a time change in May 2016.

Roman Kiln Project

11. An external consultant submitted the finalised 'Our Heritage' Heritage Lottery Fund application with supporting documents on the 5 August 2015. The application was accompanied by five letters of support, with both The Museum of London, and the Bruce Castle Museum writing letters of support.

In the later stages of completing the application process the consultant discovered documents that confirmed that the Kiln had actually been donated to the Bruce Castle Museum and was not, as previously thought, owned by the City of London.

12. On 15 September 2015 a letter was received from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Grants Office confirming that the application had not been successful. The explanation for this was given as:
'Although your bid was of good quality, there were a number of other applications which achieved our outcomes more strongly or represented better value for money. We were unable to support your bid on that basis.'
13. Understandably this response has been very disappointing but the outcome demonstrates how the grant application process is becoming increasingly competitive and there are no means to foresee exactly what other bids are being considered at the same time. There is recognition that the application would merit resubmittal but consideration needs to be given to exactly how this should be done if the process is to be repeated.
14. In a discussion with the consultant following the news from HLF, it was suggested that the application could be re submitted by Bruce Castle Museum as they are the owners of the artefact. This option could be considered as a partnership arrangement with the London Borough of Haringey.
15. The news from HLF was all the more disappointing considering the great effort that had been invested by several members of the Working Group, who had spent a great deal of time raising local awareness about the Project and also provided a stall at the 2014 Heritage Day Event focusing on the Project.
16. Plans are already underway to re constitute the Working Group and decide how best to progress the Project. The intention is to hold a meeting either in December 2015 or early in the New Year of 2016.

Sustainability

17. In the April report to the Committee the Department's Sustainability Improvement Plan was mentioned which had two overall objectives; the continued focus on reducing energy use, and seeking new opportunities for energy generation.
18. This Improvement Plan has now been converted into The Energy Efficiency Programme, one of the Department's ten core work Programmes created to realise the required savings identified in the City of London's Strategic Based Review (SBR). The Programme is progressing well and a Board comprised of the new Corporate Energy Manager, and the Responsible Procurement Officer in addition to representatives from other Open Spaces has already assembled a priority list of buildings and facilities which are energy inefficient.
19. The work of the Energy Efficiency Board is running parallel with the Corporate Energy Efficiency Programme which is being led by the Assistant Town Clerk and also the Director of Open Spaces. Much of the focus at the moment is around ensuring compliance with the new European Union Energy Efficiency Legislation encapsulated in the Energy Saving Opportunity Scheme (ESOS) which requires large Companies and Organisations to have a better understanding of their energy use.

20. This work will have a direct impact on Highgate Wood all and Divisions Open Spaces. The Open Spaces is unusual as it independently carries out internal sustainability audit and establishes Action Plans to improve performance.

Woodland Conservation and Tree Management

21. Over the course of 2015 the Highgate Wood Team have facilitated 18 two hour sessions with Heath Hands volunteers. The groups taking part range in size from 5 to 12, and contributed a total of 238 volunteer hours towards conservation management in the Wood.
22. Projects have included creating natural post and woven hedges on the field edge, through the middle of a protected bluebell area, and within a site created for 'Wild Learning', using wood from tree work, and from trunks and brash from thinning and coppicing within the two conservation areas.
23. Volunteers have also helped out with meadow management, cutting ivy off trees, pruning in the café garden, and bramble and holly control within the bluebell area, the earthwork, and around hedges and young trees within two conservation areas. Work continues with Heath Hands volunteers been well attended, with a member of the Highgate Wood Team supervising each session.



Figure 1: Volunteers enjoying a cup of tea

24. At the start of the year, we completed our survey of trees in high use areas, and all inspections have been kept up to date. Several trees with potential hazards, such as signs of splitting, have been reduced, including two old willows on the field edge. One oak in the playground that died back rapidly over the summer was reduced, with help from the Hampstead Heath Tree Team. One hornbeam that died rapidly was reduced. Dead wood was removed, and some storm damage was cleared.
25. During the dry warm weather in May through to June, we noticed an unprecedented level of squirrel damage to scores of hornbeam and beech

trees. The explanation for the level of bark stripping is still not clearly understood, but it could have been connected with a very poor 'mast' year the previous autumn. This would have caused a significant deficit in food for the squirrels over the autumn and early spring. The same levels of damage have been recorded on other sites. A number of the younger trees are so badly stripped that they will probably have to be felled.



Figure 2: extreme bark damage on young hornbeam

26. During the second half of July we experienced a series of significant limb failures which can be attributed to what is known as 'Sudden Limb Drop'. The failures are thought to be caused by sudden changes in moisture levels in the internal structure of lateral limbs of older trees, notably oak but also other species. Following the failures the Team carried out a survey across the most highly used parts of the wood to identify other limbs that might be at risk. The same operation was carried out on Hampstead Heath and this will be included in the inspection process in future years.
27. The Hampstead Heath Tree Team carried out a number of visits during the summer and autumn to assist with various tree works, including the dismantling of a mature oak in the play area which died suddenly in the summer. The tree was directly over one of the play units and the tree could not be left in its condition due to concerns about falling debris.
28. A member of the Highgate Wood Team checked the bat boxes in Highgate Wood and in Queen's Wood, and led two bat walks in Coldfall Wood, and three on Parkland Walk; one for the Friend's group and two for Islington Council. They also surveyed trees for bats on Hampstead Heath prior to the Ponds Project works, and installed and checked 12 bat boxes as part of the Pond's Project Bat Mitigation Strategy, helped by one of the Hampstead Heath Ecologist's and the Tree Team.



Figure 3: dismantling dead oak in play area

Oak decline and oak regeneration

29. Young trees were partially cut and laid to protect a section of the earthwork. The veteran oak canopy survey was carried out in June, and a new survey for protecting and monitoring 100 young oaks, so far, has been set up. As mentioned in the previous report from April all these young seedlings have now been plotted using GIS technology.
30. On the 4 October 2015 Queen's Wood and Highgate Wood launched their first joint walk looking at the two sites and comparing their differences and similarities. One of the areas the walk focused on was how the two sites have been managed over the last thirty or so years, and how successful the respective natural regeneration has been, through re coppicing. Highgate Wood started a programme of cyclical coppicing on a small scale in 1977 and has continued that to date, creating a total of eight small conservation areas.
31. In contrast Queen's Wood started their coppicing later, again on a small scale then changed to creating much more extensive areas and coppicing all the hornbeam and other tree species other than oak. The three areas coppiced over the last eight years have regenerated well and species diversity has increased significantly. Highgate Wood's more cautious approach has also been successful in allowing ground cover and the more gregarious hornbeam to naturally regenerate but it may be worth considering adopting a more vigorous approach when the next conservation area is created in 2017.



Figure 4: Queen's Wood and Highgate Wood Walk

32. Oak regeneration on both sites is poor but Queen's Wood has a higher number of younger oaks than Highgate Wood overall. Oak regeneration in woodland is a long term study area, with young trees often taking many years to establish and grow to early mature stage, unlike their counterparts growing on woodland edges or pasture, which grow at double the rate. We hope that there will be a resource to continue to monitor the successional process on both sites and to manage and conserve the oak population for successive generations.

Tree disease and biosecurity issues

33. Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) arrived as predicted on Hampstead Heath in mid-June this year, having been identified in Queen's Park only a week beforehand. This discovery triggered a flurry of activity to try and find all the existing nests and remove them before the caterpillars pupated. The Forestry Commission were very supportive providing a Team of surveyors, at no cost, who carried out a thorough search of large parts of the Heath. By the middle of July a total of 17 nests had been found, two of which were located in the Kenwood Estate.
34. Once the caterpillar presence is confirmed on a site the Forestry Commission issue a Statutory Plant Health Notice which includes a specific timelines for the removal of all nests found and the subsequent spraying of trees the following spring. Both Queen's Park and Hampstead Heath were issued with respective Plant Health Notices and both sites were then visited by a specialist contractor to remove the nests and destroy them. This work was successfully completed by the middle of July. The remaining operation will be the spraying operation which has to be carried out in the spring of 2016. It is hoped that this will at least help to contain the spread of the caterpillars, but evidence suggests that it may not necessarily accomplish this. Unfortunately

we will not know until the next summer. In the meantime we will continue to survey for other nests that may have gone unnoticed while the trees have been in leaf.

35. Two maps are shown below which clearly indicate how extensively the pest has spread this season. Figure 5 is from 2014, and Figure 6 is from 2015. Hampstead Heath is circled in black (Figure 6). Highgate Wood is around 1 o'clock on the line of the black circle.

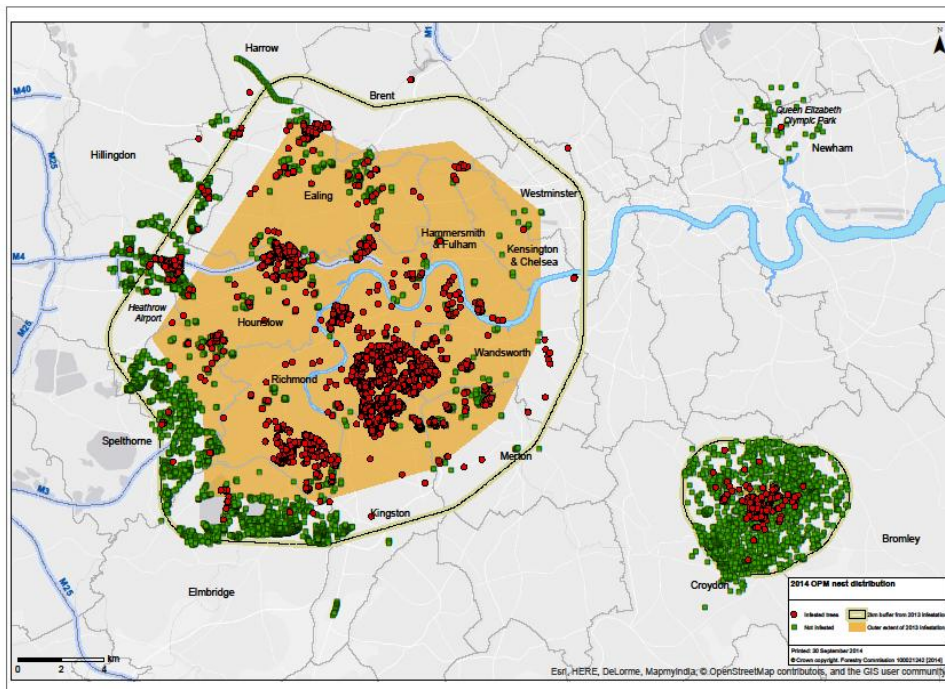


Figure 5: 2014 OPM distribution map. Red dots are confirmed OPM sites and green were clear of OPM.

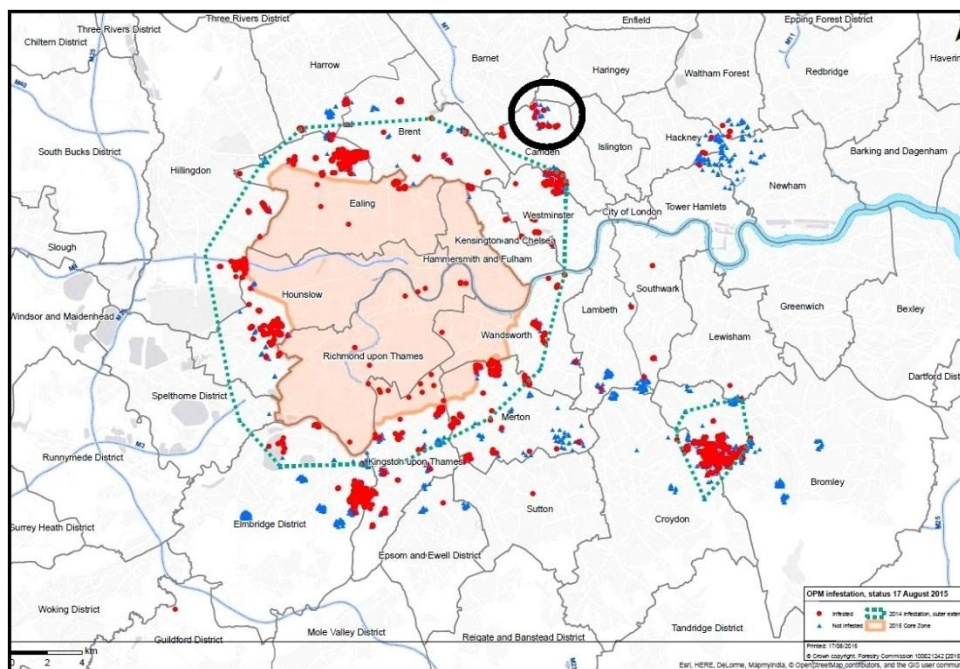


Figure 6: 2015 OPM distribution map. Red dots are confirmed OPM sites and green were clear of OPM.

Sports and Recreation

36. The cricket season started on 25 April and ended on 6 September with 39 matches being played and with only one game being cancelled by staff due to inclement weather. The staff have worked hard this season to keep the pitch to a very good standard, and we have had excellent feedback from the Teams. This is mostly due to having access to Hampstead Heath's ride on roller. This has produced a much firmer playing surface with a more even bounce and a better batting surface. The end of season renovation works took place in the first week in October after the rain had ceased. This is completed by a contractor with larger machinery who can complete the whole square in a day and a half. It would normally take us at least a week with our smaller pedestrian machinery. All four Teams paid £877.50 for ten matches
37. The football season kicked off the week after the cricket season finished on 12 September. This means the field never has a vacant slot throughout the year. The first four games were played on the upper pitch (closest to the Café) to try to give the cricket outfield some breathing space. The season is now well underway and so far we have had only one cancellation due to an away Team not turning up. Each Team paid £935 for ten matches
38. Football coaching takes place every school holidays except the February half-term week. This is due to the weather being normally very bad which gives the areas we allocate for the coach a chance to survive from the onslaught of 20 children compacting the same area for a week. The coach generally has between 10 – 20 children, and coaches various skills / techniques with fun games and a league. We charge a licence fee of £100 per week.
39. We had six official summer sports days on the three tracks we provide, and schools are not charge for sports days.
40. The trim trail items are inspected on a weekly basis and proving to be very popular with the members of public exercising.

Pavilion Café update

41. The Pavilion Café installed their new external kiosk in July and this has had a successful first season with customers able to purchase teas, coffees and ice creams without having to enter the main café area.
42. The period of 'soft market testing' was extended due to a delay in commencing the Project, and ran into the early summer. The tendering exercise is currently open, and it is assumed that the present lease holder will express an interest in continuing to manage the facility.

Community and Events

43. This year has been a busy year with the Wood being used daily for various Forest School activities. We have a partnership with two state schools, one local primary school who currently use the Wood for four days a week during school term time, and one specialist state secondary school providing education for children with specialist learning needs who use the Wood for two days a week during school term time.

44. Highgate Wood now hosts five licenced activities throughout the year, which has so far in 2015 earned £6,155.78. With Filming fees and donations income for 2015 so far coming to £900, the total income for Highgate Wood currently stands at £7,055.78 (excluding sports charges). In the previous report to this Committee there was mention that further licenced activity would have to be carefully considered against impact on the woodland environment. This may limit licenced activities to the current levels, but with a potential to increase the charges to increase income.
45. Income generation is an area that Highgate Wood clearly needs to develop but at the same time the Team are acutely aware of the impact that some of these activities are having on the woodland, particularly those events that tend to operate in the same area. For this reason the number of events may need to be capped at a level which is considered to be sustainable, and where any negative impact can be offset by moving groups to new areas to allow any ground damage to recover.
46. This year's Community Day Event (previously called the 'Highgate Wood Heritage Day') was once again well attended and enjoyed by both participants and public alike. The weather on the day was sunshine with temperatures in the low twenties. The dog show was even more popular than last year and the children enjoyed the 'back by demand' outdoor adventure play nets provide by Monkey Do.



Figure 7: Community Day Event with Dog Show in progress.

47. There appears to be broad support for changing the name of the event, but several participants suggested that the day should be more widely advertised and should be more commercially focused. In recent years attendance has been very uniform with a pleasant atmosphere and a mixture of regular users and visitors coming from further afield. The consensus from the Team is to maintain the event at its current level and retain the rural community atmosphere, and avoid the issues of trying to manage something on a larger scale with all the accompanying issues of vehicles and higher numbers of visitors.

Infrastructure and buildings

48. Work is still in progress to install remote controlled electronic gates at the vehicle access point at Onslow Gate (Figure 8). This will make a huge difference to controlling vehicle access, especially vehicles pertaining to the café. Staff are working closely with colleagues in City Surveyors Department to identify the most cost effective solution to the Project, and make use of the adjacent electrical supply cabinet on Muswell Hill Road to provide a power source. It is hoped to have the gates fully operational in late January 2016.



Figure 8: Onslow Gate will be have new electric gates

49. Other important works include programmed external re-decoration of most of the lodges, the office and the machine shed, which were scheduled to be completed in late summer and early autumn, but had to be postponed to early 2016 due to resource issues.
50. The southern section of the main pathway that runs parallel to Muswell Hill Road was resurfaced in June 2015 due to poor condition. The work was arranged by City Surveyors Department as part of cyclical pathway maintenance. The pathway was refurbished with a self-binding aggregate which after several months of 'bedding in' has consolidated and should prove to be a durable pathway surface. Self-binding material is often problematic when first installed, especially during dry warm weather, but the wetter weather that arrived in July helped consolidate the material.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

51. 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

52. 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

53. The Highgate Wood Team have worked collectively to adapt to the new changes required of them, and have shown their characteristic professionalism and innovation in overcoming resource issues. The use of casual staff has been very effective and the Team have been able to take much needed breaks over the summer period. There are still some major challenges ahead in how the impact of public access has to be balanced with impact on the woodland environment, but this is not an insurmountable issue if the public can be made to understand the issue and support the Team in future proofing Highgate Wood. It is also critical that Highgate Wood works in close partnership with other woodland sites such as Queen's Wood.

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