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| Committee(s): | Date(s): |
| Highgate Wood Joint Consultative Committee | 13 April 2016 |
| Subject: Superintendent's update for April 2016 | Public |
| Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath | For Information |
| <p>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 since November 2015. The report describes progress on operational working arrangements and income generation, sustainability, conservation and woodland management, infrastructure and facilities. This report also provides an update on changes at the Café facility and new signage and interpretation which is part of the work around the 'New identity' Project.</p> <p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>Members are asked to note the content of this report</p> <p>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 on 16 May 2016.</p> | |

Main Report

Background

1. It has been another busy six month period since November for the Highgate Wood Team. The wet windy weather throughout November and over the Christmas period caused a significant amount of disruption to activities, especially sports.
2. Volunteer activity is developing well, and licenced educational activities for pre school and primary age groups continue to grow in popularity.
3. Planning has started to identify the best location for the 2016/17 Conservation Area, and tree safety management continues to be supported by the Hampstead Heath Tree Team.
4. The electric gate installation at Onslow gate has been rescheduled to July 2016 and there are some major changes at the Pavilion Café.

5. The Highgate Wood Team are directly involved in a Divisional review of working arrangements, with the objective of improved cross team working and deploying staff support from other teams.

Planned changes to closing times during the summer months.

6. At the November 2015 meeting of this Committee, changes to summer closing times were discussed and the Committee favoured bringing the closing time back 30 minutes to 9.15pm. This time change was supported and approved by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee, and the time changes will be implemented from 2 May 2016 and will continue for 13 weeks until the 1 August 2016 when the closing time will revert to 9pm.
7. Notices informing members of the public of the changes in closing times have been placed at all the entrances to the site from 20 February, and to date we have not received any correspondence from members of the public. However, a number of regular users have spoken to the staff and there have been some expressions of concern mainly from those people who use the woods after work.
8. We will continue to communicate information about the time changes to all the various users of the Wood, to ensure that the change does not have a significant impact, and does not prove to be difficult to implement by the Highgate Wood Team. The Hampstead Heath Constabulary will be available to support the Highgate Wood Team should there be any initial difficulty in implementing the new closing time. It may well prove helpful if the Heath Constabulary could attend for the first week or so in May to support the team at closing time.

Proposed changes to working arrangements.

9. Over the last six months a comprehensive review of operational working arrangements has been carried out across Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park. The purpose of carrying out this review is to identify areas where efficiencies can be made and redeploy resources to areas which need support. The first stage of this process has already been set in motion with a weekend roster based on a duty Manager and Supervisor working a one in four programme. This has proved successful and the focus is now on extending the same process to all the other teams.
10. The proposed changes are necessary in order to ensure that our staff resources are used effectively and we maintain consistent cover throughout the year. The proposals are designed to reflect the needs of the service and maintain a work/life balance for our staff. These proposals also contribute to the savings which we are required to deliver. Highgate Wood staff have been included in this review and a four week informal consultation process finished in February 2016, following a number of meetings with staff and Trade Union Representatives. A Formal Consultation was launched on 7 March and will close on 10 April. It is intended to implement the changes to working arrangements on 1 October 2016.

Roman Kiln Project

11. At the November meeting of this Committee, the Highgate Wood Manager reported that the Heritage Lottery Bid for the Roman Kiln Project had not been successful. This was a great disappointment to both the Team and the Working Group who had done so much to support the Project.
12. Key members of the Working Group met on 24 November 2015 to review options and discuss the next steps. Unfortunately, representatives from the Museum of London and Bruce Castle Museum were not able to attend this meeting. As a central issue was additional funding, the group arranged a fund raising event for the early New Year, and involved the local MP for the area.
13. The meeting was scheduled for 28 January 2016, and the Highgate Society and the local MP were invited to attend. The intention being to have key speakers from the Working Group and the Highgate Wood Manager make an appeal for donations. This would have contributed towards the match funding element for a second application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. In early January following consultation with the City of London Press Office, it was decided to cancel the event over concerns of potential negative publicity from the local press.
14. The City of London's Senior Leadership Team have now decided that there will not be a second application for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, but will continue to support an external bid from another party.

Sustainability

15. The City of London's Corporate Energy Efficiency Programme is currently carrying out energy efficiency surveys and reports for all the City's principal public buildings, including a number of sites within the Open Spaces Department. The Open Spaces Department's own Energy Efficiency Board are working closely with members of the Corporate Energy Efficiency Board and will be meeting with City Surveyors Department to identify sites where the savings can be achieved.
16. At Highgate Wood the current focus is to improve the energy efficiency of the Café Pavilion, specifically the water heating system for the changing rooms which is scheduled for renewal. This has a synergy with the changes to the café lease, and the new arrangements for catering.

Woodland Conservation and Tree Management

17. Over the course of the autumn and winter there have been a succession of storms blowing in from the Atlantic. There were three in November alone, named benignly Abigail, Barney, and Clodagh. The Tree Incident database, that records all significant tree damage at Highgate Wood, Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park, recorded four incidents in Highgate Wood, which were directly linked to two of these storms. There have been further high winds and rain over the Christmas period and into the New Year.
18. As reported in 2015, Highgate Wood now operates a severe weather closure protocol using MET Office weather forecasts, with the Wood being closed when wind gusting speeds of 40mph and above are reached. In November Highgate Wood was closed on two occasions one of which coincided with Storm Clodagh. In December the site was closed on three occasions, and

then on the 6th and 8th February in 2016. Fortunately storms Abigail and Barney coincided with normal closing times, so there was no requirement to close the Wood to the Public. There have been a small number of complaints about closing the site during severe weather, but given the level of effective protection the protocol provides, the Tree Management Team consider it a success.

- 19.** Due to the bad weather the Team have had additional tree safety work to carry out throughout the autumn and winter. The Tree Team have provided additional support on some of the larger trees and those in close proximity to Muswell Hill Road. A total of 11 trees have had various reductions or limb removals carried out, and there were other smaller woodland clearance works carried out by Heath Hands volunteers.
- 20.** A Tree Management meeting was held on the 1 March 2016 to review the progress of tree inspections and to identify priority tree safety work. Tree Management meetings will be held quarterly, and provide additional support for the Highgate Wood Team, as well as providing an opportunity to review planned future work and enlist the support of the Tree Team, if required.
- 21.** Plans are now underway to identify the most suitable area for the 2016/17 Conservation Area. In the Conservation Management Plan two possible sites were proposed, but after some discussion another area has been put forward directly to the west of the 2012 site. There are a number of advantages to support this proposal; the clearance work will increase the light levels in the 2012 area and there are less old hornbeams to coppice, allowing for greater clearance. The area is seldom used by members of the Public and the Team hope to construct much of the fencing with the material that is coppiced.
- 22.** A close eye is being kept on squirrel activity this spring following the high levels of damage caused last year, and the discussions held on squirrel control at the November Committee Meeting. A number of the damaged hornbeams appear to be making a steady recovery where bark damage is more localised (figure 1), and even trees that appeared to be irreparably damaged may yet survive. Interestingly the affected beech trees seem less able to regenerate bark tissue.



Figure 1: Hornbeam bark regeneration

Volunteer activity

23. From November through to March there have been a total of nine Heath Hands volunteer sessions. One was cancelled due to high winds in February, but overall the numbers of attendants is very encouraging with 66 volunteers attending sessions during this period. There has been a focus on managing the woodland growing alongside the Muswell Hill Road fence line, coppicing hazel and felling some of the more seriously damaged trees following squirrel bark stripping. In November Heath Hands volunteers carried out various works in the 2012 Conservation Area including transplanting wild service tree saplings. Ivy has been cut back where it is growing on trees and there were sessions in the café garden and at the western end of the field.
24. Comparing volunteer numbers with the same period in 2014-2015, numbers were down by eight, but this can be accounted for by the cancellation of one of the planned sessions. The Team will be increasing the number of sessions gradually and are hopeful volunteers will respond positively.

Oak decline and oak regeneration

25. Work continues to monitor the 100 young oaks, which have been protected using tree shelters. The oak decline survey will be carried out again in the summer as the value of the data collection increases with the survey period. It is hoped that this work will continue as it may be the only survey of oak decline in the London area.

Tree disease and biosecurity issues

- 26.** With Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) just 1.5 kilometres away, at the Kenwood Estate and Hampstead Heath, there is a high probability that the female adult moths will fly the short distance to Highgate Wood later this year. The Team will need to be vigilant this summer in case there are nests which, as yet, have gone unnoticed. One of the lessons learned from the discovery of OPM on the Heath during the summer of 2015, was the difficulty in spotting the first small nests.
- 27.** One factor that does offer some hope is that the caterpillars seem to prefer trees on the edges of woodland where light levels are higher, and the conditions are drier and warmer. There is growing evidence that the one climatic factor that does appear to control their life cycle is long periods of wet weather, so wet cool summers may be of some benefit in helping control the spread of this pest. There are also some promising results from Forest Research into micro predation and parasitism.
- 28.** Work is now underway to schedule in spraying of effected trees on Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park. This will be carried out in April through to May, depending on when the caterpillars emerge to start feeding. This varies from year to year, but can be early as late March if the weather is mild. With the spraying operation taking place this spring on Hampstead Heath we will learn more about the process and be able to plan for when the same operation has to be carried out in Highgate Wood. Staff will also have to work closely with the Tree Section from the Local Boroughs of both Haringey and Camden.

Sports and Recreation

- 29.** The weather has been very changeable over the last six months. From early January 2016 there have been prolonged periods of rain resulting in twelve football games being called off up to the beginning of February 2016. Understandably this has had an impact on income generation.
- 30.** Site closures due to high winds led to another three games being called off (one match each in November, December and February). The season is coming to an end on the weekend of 16/17 March, and all but one of the Teams will have played their allocated games. The Cricket season starts on the weekend of 23/24 March, so work is underway to prepare the cricket square and outfield.
- 31.** At the end of the 2015 cricket season the entire cricket square was stripped down. This involves removing as much thatch (dead grass) as possible and then top dressing with new soil and seed. This has come through very well and staff have been aerating the cricket square over the winter months to alleviate compaction and surface water. The first cutting has taken place and preparations are underway for the new 2016 cricket season.

Pavilion Café update

32. The Pavilion Café tender has now progressed and a three year lease, which will commence on 9 May 2016, was approved by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee on 14 March 2016.
33. The lease was awarded to Benugo, a family friendly catering outlet who will take over the premises on the 9 May 2016. There may be a period of renovation works carried out to the café facility from May, however temporary catering facility will be provided during this time.

Community and Events

34. A member of the Highgate Wood Team, in their capacity as a bat expert, has provided specialist advice to the London Borough of Haringey, working with the Conservation Officer and Tree Officer to maintain monitoring equipment in the new hibernation tunnels near Highgate Station. These sites are attracting a number of species including Natterer's, Duabenton's, Brown Long-Eared, and Common Pipistrelle. Further advice was given in January 2016 to Haringey Council regarding bat conservation in Bluebell Wood.

Infrastructure and buildings

35. The installation of the electronic gates at Onslow Gate has been delayed. It had been hoped that the Project would be completed by the end of March 2016, but progress was delayed and there have been some changes in City Surveyors with key staff leaving. Funds will be allocated from the 2016 Local Risk Budget for the gates to be installed before the summer holidays.
36. External redecoration and rainwater goods works have commenced at the Pavilion Café and are scheduled in for the three timber buildings in the yard and two of the lodges.
37. After a recent tree inspections it was decided the small sandpit in the under 5's play area should be located away from a large horizontal oak tree limb. The old sandpit was dismantled and removed and a new sandpit was constructed by the Team using railway sleepers, and is now located well outside the canopy line of the nearby oak thus reducing risk significantly.

New signage and interpretation

38. New signage and interpretation boards were installed in February 2016 at all the entrances and at the information building (figure 2). The new site maps are a great improvement on the earlier versions, and the interpretation boards are a welcome new feature on the field side of the education building.



Figure 2: New interpretation boards

Planning and Local Development

39. There are two major new housing developments under construction in close proximity to the Wood, which will have a significant impact on visitor numbers. The old Hospital site on Woodside Avenue is in the process of being developed for purpose built flats and houses, and the old Magistrates Court opposite the Archway Road entrance to the Wood has now been completely demolished in preparation for a new residential development.
40. Both development sites are within 100 metres of Highgate Wood and will inevitably lead to increased numbers of visitors. The central residential tower on the Archway Road development will have the additional impact of being clearly visible from inside the Wood, particularly in the winter months.

Conservation Management Plan review

41. We are now entering year four of the ten year Management Plan, and making steady progress with a number of its objectives. The main successes have been in the Natural Environment and Community sections, with continued success with Heath Hands volunteer sessions, and strengthening links with Queen's Wood through developing joint public walks. Queen's Wood have led the way over the last three years with their recent coppicing compartments and this provides Highgate Wood with a useful example of a more traditional approach which may be applied in the 2016/17 Conservation Area.
42. The increasing numbers of visitors, mainly children, taking part in the various licenced activities is fulfilling the educational objectives set out in the plan. Highgate Wood educational activities will also need to align with the new

Departmental operating model launched in 2015 which focuses on five specific outcomes with which success will be measured. These are Understanding, Confidence, Involvement, Wellbeing, and Connection. There has to be element of caution when developing activities as it needs to be measured against the direct or indirect impact on the woodland environment and this is an area we need to focus on in the next few years. This was referred to in the reports of 2015, and will be a continuing theme in future reports to the Committee.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

43. 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

44. The operational requirements highlighted in the report will be met from the Superintendent's Local Risk Budget.

Conclusion

45. Highgate Wood will see some significant changes in 2016, with the new Pavilion Café lease, and the changes to closing times starting this summer. There will be a continued focus on woodland management and decisions to be made on the location of the next Conservation Area. There will also be a heightened awareness of tree pest and disease issues and on-going work to strengthen partnerships with other woodland sites such as Queen's Wood.

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