

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee	27 June 2016 18 July 2016
Subject: Habitat restoration of the Boating Pond and Tumulus Field	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Decision

Summary

The Ponds Project has had a major impact on the Boating Pond and Tumulus Field. This document outlines restoration work which will be undertaken to create an attractive and ecologically more valuable landscape, and requests the Committee's opinions on a proposal to alter a proposed design change.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Comment on the habitat restoration proposals
- Comment on a proposed change to the original plan regarding an edge profile.

Main Report

Background

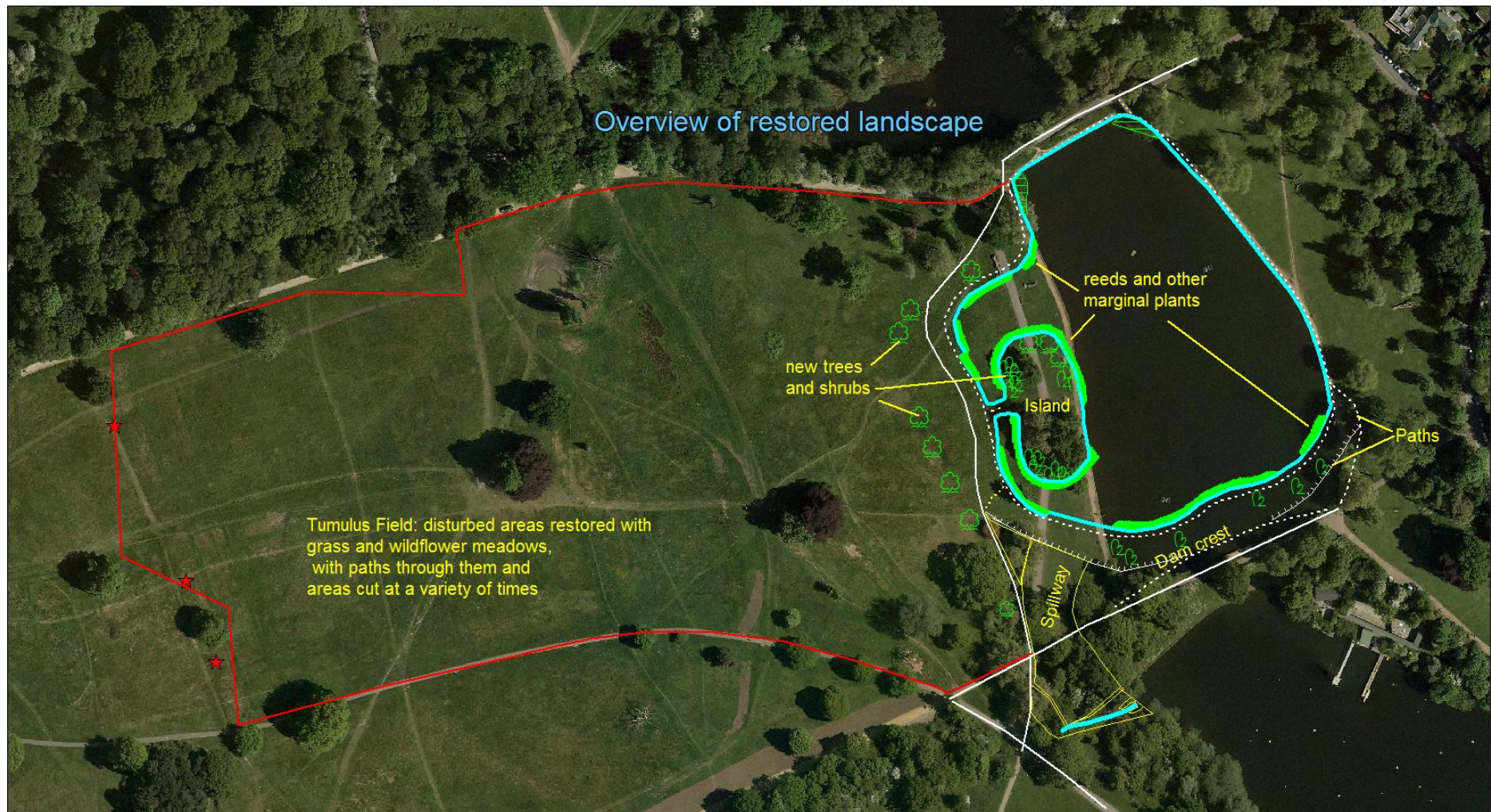
1. Major work for the Ponds Project has been undertaken at the Boating Pond and Tumulus Field. The dam is being raised, and the shape of the pond and the profile of the adjacent slope to the west will both change. The new dam faces and several hectares of Tumulus Field will be covered in bare soil at the termination of the engineering works in October 2016. Restoration is required to create an attractive area in keeping with the landscape and ecology of the Heath.

The former landscape and ecology

2. Prior to the Ponds Project the Pond was roughly rectangular in shape, with vertical sheet-piled sides dropping straight into the water. Fish were (and still are) abundant, including large carp popular with anglers. There was no submerged or floating vegetation on the pond apart from occasional algal blooms, and marginal vegetation was limited to plants on rafts in and round the edges of the pond and two small reed beds. The pond was of relatively little ecological interest.
3. The affected part of Tumulus Field was covered in rough grassland. The sward was exceptionally poor in plant species and of little ecological interest.

The restored landscape

4. The proposals for restoration are almost entirely as set out in the agreed plans for the Project (see figure 1 below). One detail of the design which it is proposed to modify is described below under Options.
5. The new dam will be covered in grassland containing some wild flowers, and will be mown several times a year. The pond itself will remain of a similar size overall, but will be a different shape from formerly and contain a tree- and shrub-covered island; paths will encircle the pond. The west and south edges will be lined with marginal vegetation; some of the plants will be tall-growing reeds, but others will be lower-growing, permitting views over them across the pond. The beds of marginal plants will be permanently fenced on the land-ward side and also possibly on the pond-ward side to prevent water birds grazing the vegetation.
6. Angling will be permitted at designated places along the new west and south sides of the pond. Details will be confirmed once a fishing policy for the Heath has been agreed.
7. The affected parts of Tumulus Field will be sown with seed mixes containing different mixes of native grasses and perennial wild flowers. Some areas will be just grassy, others will be dominated by grasses but also contain some wild flowers, and yet others will contain grasses but with a higher proportion of wild flowers. These latter should resemble the 'Sparrows' site above the running track at Parliament Hill. Paths will be mown through the area and the wild flower areas will be cut annually, not all at the same time.
8. The landscape will be more attractive than formerly. The edges of the water will be vegetated in place of stark vertical sheet piling. The dam will afford unrivalled views over the Boating Pond, ponds to the south, and in summer the flowery meadows of Tumulus Field.
9. The restored landscape will also be much richer ecologically. The marginal vegetation will improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat, including refuges for young fish. Tumulus Field will possess a richer flora and will be particularly valuable for bees, butterflies and other insects.
10. Appendix 1 to this report presents a habitat management plan for the pond and affected areas of Tumulus Field. Further design details can be found there.



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Figure 1: Overview of restored Pond and affected parts of Tumulus Field

Options

11. The plans show several sections of the pond edge which will front directly on the open water, i.e. will not be lined with marginal planting. These include four lengths where the bank is designed to slope directly down into the water. At two of these, along the dam front, the adjoining bed of the pond is to be covered in gravel, see figure 2 below.

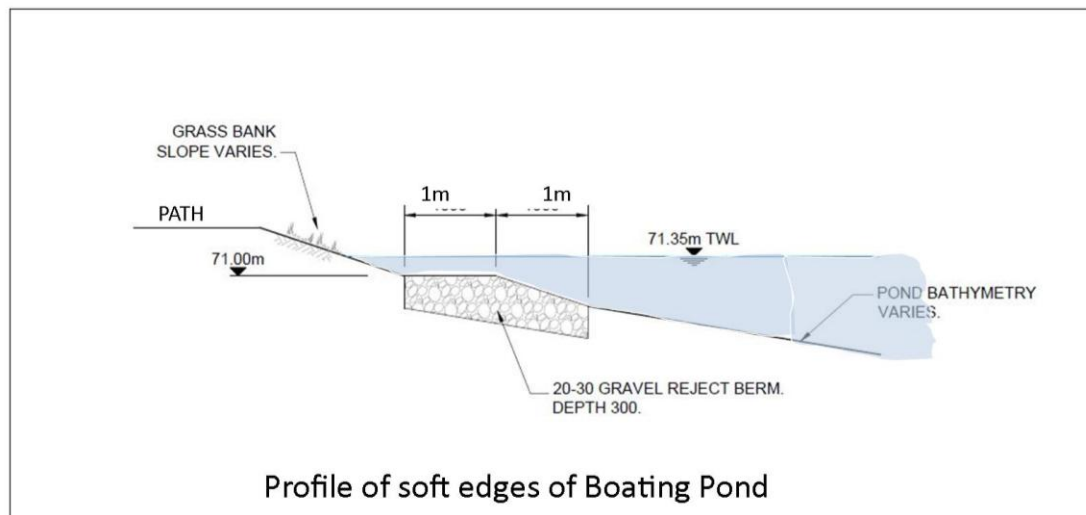


Figure 2: existing plan for unplanted margins of Boating Pond

12. These arrangements will tempt, in fact seemingly invite, people and dogs to enter the water here. This raises serious issues both of public safety and the protection of wildlife:
- Unsupervised swimming in the Heath's Ponds is prohibited and is dangerous; it resulted in a fatality at the Men's Pond in 2015. Wading in and even just paddling could cause serious injury from litter on the pond bed, such as broken glass.
 - On this chain of ponds, dogs are allowed into the water at Highgate no 1 pond. Unfettered access there resulted in conflicts with wildlife and reduced water quality, and it was found necessary to install unsightly barriers to prevent dogs getting far into the pond. Something similar might well be required here.
 - These gaps are the obvious places for angling, but there will then be a conflict between fishing, people and dogs.
 - The sloping edges of the pond are likely to become an unsightly muddy morass, as has happened elsewhere.
13. Regretfully, there are therefore several reasons for altering the design of these new soft edges to the Boating Pond, even though it seemed an attractive idea initially. It is therefore proposed to replace the open, gently sloping edges with a low vertical edge about 30cm high, secured with horizontal logs. This design

would not totally prevent people and dogs getting into the water, but at least should reduce them. It would provide a good base for angling.

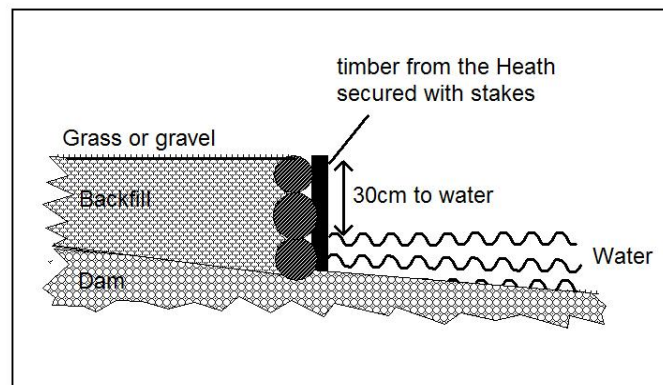


Figure 3: Proposed new design for unplanted margins of Boating Pond

14. The proposals for the restoration of the Pond and Tumulus Field, including the redesign of soft edges to a vertical profile, were presented to the Ponds Project Community Working Group at their meeting on 23 May 2016. The proposals were supported unanimously.
15. The Members of the Committee are requested to give their opinions on this proposal.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

16. The work supports the City Together Strategy theme ... “protects, promotes and enhances our environment”.
17. It also links to the Open Spaces Department Plan through the Strategic Aim to “adopt sustainable working practices, promote the variety of life (biodiversity) and protect the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations”, and the Improvement Objective to “ensure that measures to promote sustainability and biodiversity are embedded in the Department’s work”.

Implications

18. The proposals will reduce safety risks associated with the original proposals for the Boating Pond.
19. The financial implications arising from this report will be funded from the Ponds Project Capital Budget.

Conclusions

20. The proposals for restoring the Boating Pond will result in a ‘greener’ and less municipal looking pond, and sections of the adjoining parts of Tumulus Field will

be transformed into flowery meadows. There will be significant improvements to the ecology of the area.

21. A detail of the original plans would result in issues of public safety, conflict of use and damage to ecology. A modification is proposed.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Management plan for the habitat restoration of Boating Pond and Tumulus Field.

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