

Committee(s)	Dated:
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee – For Discussion	07.11.2016
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee – For Decision	21.11.2016
Subject: Review of Annual Work Programme 2016 and the Proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan for Jan 2017 to March 2018	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Decision
Report author: Jonathan Meares – Open Spaces Department	

Summary

This report provides a review of the management operations and activities carried out on Hampstead Heath over the past 12 months as part of the 2016 Annual Work Programme and considers the new proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan for January 2017 to March 2018, appended to this report.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that:

- Members of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee note the work undertaken during 2016, and discuss the proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan for January 2017 to March 2018 appended to this report.
- That the views of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee are conveyed to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee at their November meeting.
- That Members of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee agree the proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan for January 2017 to March 2018 at their November meeting.

Main Report

Background

1. The Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan has been prepared for the period January 2017 to March 2018, covering five seasons. This is to enable a transition from the previous calendar year planning cycle to align instead with the financial year. This will coincide with the revised Hampstead Heath

Management Plan timescale and with the Corporate Business planning cycles. Following this transition period, it will continue as an annual programme, commencing in April of each year and ending the following March.

2. Hampstead Heath is a 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.
3. The Hampstead Heath Management Plan states that the City will draw together an annual work programme for the Heath, in consultation with local groups and interested parties. This Annual Work 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, and footpath maintenance and fencing works.
4. For completeness, the major tasks within the formal areas of the Heath have also been included within the proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan for January 2017 to March 2018.

Review of the 2016 Annual Work Programme

Tree Management

5. 2016 was another challenging year for the Tree Team, balancing their work between Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) and Massaria management, core tree survey work, as well as operational tree works across Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park. The Ponds Project also presented some issues relating to tree protection and pruning for access for plant and machinery.

Biosecurity and tree disease issues

6. OPM is a biosecurity issue that the Tree Team continues to manage. This year the process of surveying for nests commenced in late April and continued into May. Spraying commencing in May at seven locations on Hampstead Heath, where nests were located last year, and new nests were discovered this year.
7. The same contractor who removed the nests last year carried out the spraying using a specialist tractor driven misting unit on loan from The Netherlands (Appendix 2, Figure 1). In total an additional 20 trees, compared to 2015, were located with active OPM nests over the surveying period and removed.
8. Pheromone trapping was carried out in July and August and this clearly identified a marked increase in OPM (male moths) in the Hampstead Heath area.
9. With the on-going efforts to manage the spread of OPM the Tree Team have also had to ensure that they maintain focus on Massaria the London Plane fungal disease that effects lateral limbs and can cause rapid decay and failure. The Team have been actively managing the core areas of London Planes at South End Green, Highgate Road, Parliament Hill Fields and at Queen's Park. There will be additional works at South End Green in autumn and winter, as Massaria is now well established in this area.

10. Sadly but not surprisingly Hampstead Heath now has a number of locations where Ash Dieback has been found and confirmed by the Forest Research following sample analysis. As with the other tree pest and disease issues that the Tree Team is currently managing, we will follow the Forestry Commission's advice and tackle the spread and development of this disease to the best of our abilities. Both the Tree Officer and the Conservation and Tree Manager have a wide network from which support and advice can be drawn and there is the reassurance that many of their colleagues are facing the same challenges.

Veteran Trees and the Ponds Project

11. As the result of the loss of a veteran oak next to the Highgate entrance into the Kenwood Estate in May, veteran tree work has been chiefly focused around those trees within the Ponds Project construction areas and access routes. A Tree Radar survey utilising ground penetrating radar technology was also commissioned for a number of the veteran oaks at the eastern end of South Meadow to identify tree rooting zones and to assist in planning protection and future management.
12. The Ponds Project Construction programme has generated a significant amount of work for the Team and included in this were works to protect and conserve veteran trees within the construction sites or close to access routes. In September the Ponds Project Contractors were instructed to install an anti-compaction material within the root protection area of the large veteran oak on the western side of the Model Boating Pond (Appendix 2, Figure 2). This section of the new diverted pathway was successfully completed in time for the tarmacking operation in late September, and with virtually no damage to the oak's rooting system due to 'no dig' construction design.
13. The Tree Team provided a veteran tree workshop in July, chaired by the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, attended by Members the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee, and the Heath & Hampstead Society's Heath Sub-committee. The Tree Team provided an update on the state and management of the Veteran Trees across Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood. Presentations were given on current management, failure, pests and disease issues and tree health care projects. There was also a joint presentation on the surrounding historical treescape and issues facing its conservation and recognition. The group then undertook a walk looking at and discussing a number of veteran trees and associated issues on site.

Core work and tree inspections

14. There have been a total of 54 reported tree incidents since the beginning of 2016 across Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park. This is consistent with previous years, but we are now approaching the autumn with the increased likelihood of severe weather events and potential tree damage. The Tree Team will be extending the current extreme weather protocol used in Highgate Wood to Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park to ensure a coordinated approach and improved safety for both members of the public and staff. The process depends on local MET office weather reports so that the public can be given acceptable notice of sites being closed.
15. Tree inspections have progressed well this year with an additional qualified inspector from the Conservation Team now carrying out tree inspections. This

has allowed the Team to increase their overall quota this year to 3,181 trees inspected on Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park. Highgate Wood has a separate data base but the process is the same and the Tree Team now hold quarterly review meetings in Highgate Wood to ensure that the inspection process is in on track. The Tree Team also provide additional support and advice if required.

16. The Tree Team have also managed to provide a specialist service to Royal Parks in the form of folial spraying using a specially formulated 'compost tea'. This is part of a scientific survey to measure the effect on tree health and vitality being conducted by an arboricultural consultancy.

Nature Conservation Work

17. The Conservation Team have successfully managed to complete a large part of the planned work included in the 2016 Annual Work Programme, including grass cutting, hedge laying, and woodland management. The Team were called in to assist with vegetation removal to support the Ponds Project and completed a programme of cyclical maintenance on the principal dam structures ahead of the bi-annual reservoir inspections. Included in the 2016 work were several projects including maintaining the surface on Millfield Lane.

Ponds project related works

18. Due to unforeseen access issues at several of the Ponds Construction sites the Conservation Team were called in to clear a number of small trees in the mixed Pond western bank so that the de-silting operation could be carried out. The operation involved winching several collapsed or low growing trees clear of the water to allow access. The Team also carried out some small sapling planting on the Tumulus Field, and wildflower planting at the Stock Pond and the Ladies' Pond Compound. In addition, native holly and yew were planted along the western boundary of the Ladies' Pond to improve screening.
19. The Team have also been involved in creating multiple Hibernaculum for grass snakes at a number of locations including the Mixed pond, Viaduct, Vale of Health, Hampstead No. 1 pond, and the Bird Sanctuary.
20. With the completion of the Vale of Health and Viaduct spillways the sites have been handed back to the Conservation Team to manage and these grass areas have been mown to retain the prescribed height of sward.

Hedgerows and Cross Country Repairs

21. Sections of hedgerow were laid on the Heath Extension during the early part of 2016, prior to the start of the bird nesting season. There will be more work carried out October to December. This will include the section running along the edge of the cricket field at Parliament Hill which is causing issues with access for some of the tractor driven machinery.
22. The Conservation Team had to wait for several weeks before they could undertake repairs to the areas impacted by the National Cross Country event in February, due to the wet weather conditions and waterlogged ground. Once the ground had become firmer chain harrowing, and reseeding took place and by April the works were completed and ground had started to recover.

Grassland management

23. Once the weather improved in late June the grass cutting operation could start and this year has seen almost perfect cutting conditions with a prolonged hot dry summer. The actual area cut was smaller than last year at 7.3 hectares, largely due to the large Ponds Project compounds at the Tumulus Field and access restrictions during the final critical stages of the construction phase of the project. The Team also carried out a further cutting operation for the Kenwood Estate amounting to 5 hectares. In total 105 hay bales were produced which this year have been removed by an agricultural haulage contractor.
24. Preparations are now underway to work with the Ponds Project Landscape Contractor to commence the work of reseedling the Tumulus Field and Pryor's Field following the completion of ground restoration and seed bed preparation. The total area of the two sites combined is 6 hectares and there will be a mixture of grassland and wildflower areas.

Secondary woodland management and Compartment works

25. This year there has been a focus on the Fleet Stream compartment clearing back vegetation and coppicing to improve light levels and some work to encourage seasonal pools to improve species diversity and habitat value. These works form part of the prescriptions included in the Compartment Management Plans which were adopted in 2014, and fitted well with the ecological improvement works being carried out at the same time at nearby ponds on the Hampstead chain as part of the Ponds Project.
26. The Team also continued the cyclical work in the Orchard site next to the Kenwood Education Garden, re-coppicing the hazel and also removing some of the large over mature sycamores on the site's eastern boundary with Athlone House.

Rural Infrastructure maintenance

27. The Conservation Team carried out repairs to the un-made surface of the Millfield Lane, which had deteriorated over the last few years. Following a productive meeting with local residents, it was agreed to proceed with surface repairs to achieve a suitable surface for pedestrian and cycling usage. The works commenced in September and have progressed well with only a short section remaining to be completed (Appendix 2, Figure 3). The response to the repair work has been positive from both local residents and regular users of the path.
28. Surface improvements will be taking place at Kenwood Yard over the next few months along with drainage works, as part of City Surveyors Project. Kenwood Yard is a very busy hub with major storage and holding areas for most of the Division's plant and machinery. The yard surface has deteriorated over the last three years and needs investment to create a durable long term work surface.

Heath Hands and progress with the Whitestone Garden restoration and Kenwood Education Garden.

29. The excellent work to continue managing both the Whitestone Garden and the Kenwood Educational Garden goes from strength to strength. From to August

this year there were a total of 452 volunteer hours spent on the two sites and both areas reflect the efforts that have been invested in their ongoing care and enhancement.

30. Along with the two autonomous areas, the Conservation and Ecology Teams continue to work with Heath Hands on a number of other cyclical conservation programmes, including the conservation of the gorse compartments and control of invasive plants. Volunteers also worked with the Team on building hibernaculum as part of the habitat improvements involved in the Ponds Project.

Monthly Ham & High Articles

31. The Conservation Team Supervisor has been producing a series of informative short pieces every month for the Ham & High Newspaper covering a wide variety of Conservation topics from butterflies to sphagnum bogs.

Ecological Work

32. The Ponds Project has been the central focus of both Heath Ecologists since the start of the Project. Their input has been critical to ensuring the final results have optimum ecological benefits.
33. Input has included advising on the species and design of the aquatic planting, comprising about 30,000 plants; choosing the seed mixes and designing the layout for the six hectares of wild flower meadows on Tumulus and Pryor's Field; ensuring the work was carried out to a high standard; and checking the progress of the work. Several changes to the designs were made at the suggestion of the Ecologists, such as replacing two sections of open edges at the Boating Pond with vertical edges to deter swimming by dogs and people.
34. A great deal of emphasis was placed on the conservation and ecological improvements that would accompany the main engineering work at the outset of the Project and this has been largely achieved. The Bird Sanctuary now benefits from a new channel that will help to extend the life of the existing reed bed. In addition, scrapes were also created at the back of the Bird Sanctuary and the top end of the Ladies' Pond, near Stock Pond; these will provide useful wet habitat, especially breeding sites for frogs.
35. The Ecologists have also been involved in a number of other projects. A programme to monitor hedgehogs throughout the Heath involved volunteers. Twelve volunteers attended hedgehog ecology and monitoring techniques training session and 15 volunteers have assisted further on eight nightly monitoring sessions. Early results reveal that hedgehogs appear to be widely spread across the Heath, which is good news for this species, which suffers general national decline.
36. The Ecologists have also been closely involved in working with Heath Hands. Volunteers. The reptile monitoring scheme on Hampstead Heath is now just finishing its 6th season, during which over 30 volunteers have been involved with nearly 600 snake records logged in total. From these records it is believed that the population of grass snakes has increased on the Heath. Winter hibernacula have been created with egg laying sites to follow. A reptile ecology and monitoring training session was also run in the summer. The Ecologists

have also liaised with Heath Hands in the control of Himalayan Balsam; this year was a particularly bad one for this invasive alien species.

Heath Ranger Team

37. The Heath Ranger Team have worked hard this year juggling their time between public interaction concerning the Ponds Project, wild life rescue incidents, and managing the traffic at a number of events through the summer including the Affordable Art Fair and Grown London.
38. They have also managed to deliver some significant landscape projects including the ongoing work to improve the view point at Parliament Hill along with the layout and reinstatement of memorial benches. They have also commenced work to improve the overgrown area inside the fencing at South End Green, part of a wider project to remove the old wooden fencing and open up sight lines.
39. The Heath Ranger Team provide an important weekend emergency tree service for the Division and they have reported and carried out a number of making safe operations throughout 2016.
40. Swan rescue and monitoring continues to be a focus for the Team based at East Heath with numerous call outs to perform rescues from fenced off areas and fishing tackle accidents. The Team continue to work closely and collaboratively with the Hampstead Heath Constabulary, especially in relation to reports of lost children and anti-social behaviour.

Formal Areas

41. The Gardening and Sports and Recreation Keeping Teams have had a challenging and creative year, completing approved projects in the 2016 Annual Work Programme and completing the cyclical 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 & Hill Garden

42. Planting of sustainable perennials in the eastern boarder of the walled garden and the final phase of re-planting works on the winter border in the Hill Garden have been undertaken by the Gardening Team.
43. Stage four of the stumpery has been completed, as has the Disabled car park re-landscaping works (Appendix 2, Figure 4).

Sports Facilities and Filming Events

44. The Sports and Recreation Keeping Team managed all the winter and summer sports grass pitches to a high standard. The Team have managed over 90 separate film location shoots, ensuring the Heath landscape is protected at all times.

Parliament Hill Fields

45. Works have been carried out to the Bull path, including planting native plants ox-eye daisy, meadow cranesbill, cowslip and small scabious in the grass area.

46. The Swain's Lane landscape planting scheme has been completed (Appendix 2, Figure 5).

Operational Team

The Operational Team ensures the Heath has a well maintained plant, machinery and equipment and that janitorial supplies are in stock. During 2015/6 the Team have been cladding bins on the Heath to soften their appearance and help the bins blend into the surroundings (Appendix 2, Figure 6).

Corporate & Strategic Implications

47. The preparation and implementation of an Annual Work Programme in accordance with the Hampstead Heath 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*.
48. The actions for the new proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan for January 2017 to March 2018 are set out under the main character areas of the Heath.

Implications

49. The costs of meeting the proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan for January 2017 to March 2018 will be funded through the Superintendent's Local Risk Budget. Wherever possible, opportunities will be sought for external funding to support these essential works. Opportunities for volunteers will continue to be promoted and developed.

Conclusion

The Heath is a complex site and it is not possible 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 proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan set out our intentions for the year, subject to the Committee's comments.

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Proposed Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan January 2017 to March 2018.
- Appendix 2 – Photographs of works carried out on site.

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