

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee	<b>9 January 2017</b>
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Woods and Queen's Park Management Committee	<b>30 January 2017</b>
<b>Subject:</b> Ponds Project Landscape Progress Report	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Philip Everett – Project Director Bob Warnock – Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, Open Spaces	<b>For Information</b>
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### Summary

Extensive work has been undertaken to restore and improve the ecology and natural landscape of areas impacted by the Ponds Project. This includes substantial quantities of trees, shrubs, wild flower and aquatic planting, digging new pools and channels, erecting bat boxes and creating hibernacula for amphibians and grass snakes.

This report summarises these works, many of which have been undertaken as the engineering phase of the project drew towards its close in the autumn of 2016.

Work will continue in the spring to monitor and maintain the new landscape and environmental improvements.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. The Ponds Project's construction phase finished, on time, in October 2016 after an 18 month programme. The Ponds Project was initiated following a series of hydrological studies which revealed that in the event of a severe storm, there was a risk that the reservoirs on Hampstead Heath could overtop, potentially leading to erosion and dam failure, putting lives, property and infrastructure at risk. Between 2012 and the summer of 2014, a highly iterative and consultative process was undertaken to consider the design criteria and approach, and then a

wide range of options. An option for each chain of ponds was selected and approved on the basis that it satisfied the existing requirements of the Reservoirs Act 1975 and the anticipated requirements under the Flood & Water Management Act 2010, whilst preserving the natural aspect and state of the Heath in the most effective manner, in accordance with the City's duties under the Hampstead Heath Act 1871, and in accordance with the agreed design principles.

### **Work completed to restore the landscape and ecology**

2. Restoration and enhancement of the landscape impacted by the Ponds Project was integral to the project and this is now nearly complete. This entailed installing aquatic plants round the margins of ponds, seeding large areas with wild flowers and grasses, laying turf, planting wild flower plugs, and planting trees and shrubs. Much of the work was undertaken during the late summer and autumn of 2016 as the engineering works progressed to completion.
3. Reeds and other marginal plants have been installed around edges of nine of the ponds where work has taken place, adding nearly 1,800 square metres of new wetland planting to the Heath. These new habitats have substantial wildlife benefits and provide habitat and feeding for birds, fish and amphibians. The plants also help maintain water quality, and provide a much more natural landscape compared with former hard edges.
4. Fencing is required on the landward side to prevent disturbance from dogs. Until it is fully established, the vegetation also requires protection from grazing by waterfowl, but the need for long-term water-side fencing will be kept under review as the plants become established. Gaps have been left in the planting to allow for direct access to the water which are necessary for angling and model boating.
5. About six hectares of wild flower meadow have been sown, chiefly on the sites of the compounds at Tumulus and Pryor's Fields. Two main types of seed mixes were used in a carefully designed matrix. The first mix comprises wild grasses and low-growing wild flowers, such as bedstraw and bird's-foot trefoil; the resulting sward should be relatively resistant to foot traffic and picnicking etc. The second additionally contains taller wild flowers such as ox-eye daisy, and should produce a spectacular display of great value to butterflies and bees.
6. Wild flower seed mixes need to be sown thinly to be successful. Seeded areas will thus take time to establish and fences around these areas are unlikely to be removed before next summer.
7. Turf composed of wild flowers and grasses has been laid on new spillways, the Boating Pond dam and the front of the Catchpit dam. It is a requirement of the Supervising Engineer that these areas be mown several times a year. This will restrict the display of wild flowers but on the other hand provide suitable swards for public access and enjoyment. Fences have been removed from many of the turfed areas.

8. In total, well over a thousand wild flower bulbs and plug plants have been planted at three ponds, and further planting is planned at the Ladies Pond. About 40 trees and 140 shrubs have been planted. These include two large plane trees and five disease-resistant English Elms; it is exciting to see the return of this latter species, which was eradicated as a mature tree on the Heath in the 1970s and 80s due to Dutch Elm disease. Oak, black poplar, birch and hawthorns have also been planted – all of which are native to Britain.
9. Environmental work was not restricted to planting and seeding. Two stretches of the River Fleet have been restored, totalling about 80m in length. They were previously piped below the surface but now run above ground. Several wetland pools, scrapes and channels have also been created at the Ladies Pond, the Bird Sanctuary Pond and south of the Catchpit. Log piles and amphibian and grass snake hibernacula have also been created at various suitable locations, and 20 bat boxes will have been put up by the end of the winter. Some of the boxes have been installed for over a year and we have observed bats, as well as birds, using them.
10. The work has been undertaken in close liaison with and help of the Heath ecologists and the Conservation Team. Some of the planting was carried out by the Conservation Team, and Heath Hands volunteers built the two hibernacula and the brash and log piles. Volunteers have also assisted with the removal of fencing.
11. Aerators have been installed at each of the ponds to also help improve water quality. These are powered by an electrical supply and the controls are housed in nearby green cabinets, which are approximately 1.5m by 1.5m. A planting scheme is currently being devised by the Heath team to help camouflage these green boxes at a couple of locations, namely Highgate No. 1 Pond and Stock pond. The intention is to install a planting box to the top of the green cabinet and grow ivy and honeysuckle down the sides.
12. Since the works have been completed on Model Boating Pond, there are noticeable more waterfowl using the pond, probably due to the new planting providing feeding for them. Towards the end of the construction period, a debate about the future use of the island on Model Boating Pond has taken place with one member of the public starting a petition. The petition argues it would be best left as a bird sanctuary and should be not accessible to the public. However, this does restrict the amount of space for angling, effectively cutting off the whole eastern edge of the pond. It would also potentially affect those who wish to sail model boats, who require access to all sides of the pond. (Discussed further below)

### **Completion of the construction works**

13. The final construction elements of the project were finished in October 2016 after which BAM Nuttall made a gradual withdraw from the Heath while working their way through a snagging list. Their final compound on the lower Fairground site will be dismantled in December and the withdrawal of their site office from

Kenwood nursery will happen at around the same time. They have a 12 month maintenance period.

14. Official handover documentation has been produced for each pond which includes 'As Built' drawings and specifications on planting.

### **The programme for 2017 and future years**

15. The engineering and environmental works will need to be closely monitored, especially in 2017, but continuing into subsequent years. Trees, shrubs and other planted material will need to be watered as required, and any failures rectified. Fences are in the process of being removed and paths mown through the newly accessibly areas. These tasks will be undertaken by the Heath's Ranger and Conservation teams.
16. Monitoring will also cover the effects of the work, including assessments of water quality.

### **Stakeholder Engagement and Communications**

17. The Community Working Group, which was set up as part of Camden's planning conditions met again in December 2016 and will meet for one final time in Spring 2017. We recognise there is still a role for this group to monitor the scheme and we will continue to remain in contact with them for the foreseeable future.
18. Other communications on the project have received praise from the public, including the weekly emails with updates on the project. The Ponds Project blog has also been favourably received and regularly receives around 2000 visits per month and has received as many as 4,300 visits in one month. It can be found at <https://hampsteadheathpondsproject.wordpress.com>. The blog will continue to provide information on the restoration phase of the Ponds Project and a separate blog is being developed to cover wider Heath news and information.
19. Comments, questions and concerns on the Ponds Project are continuing to come in to the Ponds Project Liaison officer by various channels. These will be monitored, responded to and logged in a similar way as they were during the project. One query which has been raised by several people is why the island is not to be left as a bird sanctuary and as previously mentioned, an online petition on this subject has also been started. An explanation has been provided on the development of the island, in consultation with Heath staff and stakeholders, and the reasons behind the public access, which is linked to retaining access for anglers and model boaters and also due to a concern that people, and dogs, may be tempted to swim out to the island which would be dangerous. We have agreed to monitor the usage of the island over the coming months and years. As a compromise, the Heath's ecologist have drawn up a proposal to fence off a 500m<sup>2</sup> section at the north of the island as a refuge for birds and other wildlife. This area would also take in the new trees which have been planted on the island and provide protection for them too.

A series of 'Lessons Learnt' meetings took place in October 2016, involving Officers who have been involved in the project and stakeholders who were involved in the consultation process. A summary of the discussion with

stakeholder is attached as Appendix 1. A final Gateway 7 report will be drafted by the Project Director.

### **Financial Summary**

20. The project is expected to be completed within the approved budget, subject to agreeing the final account and any potential claims from the contractor

### **Conclusion**

21. The construction phase of the Ponds Project has been delivered on time and the newly landscape ponds fit well into the landscape of the Heath. Next year, after a growing season the sites will look even better and those who have not visited the Heath before may not realise that such a large amount of work has taken place. The legacy of the project - the environmental enhancements and the on-going maintenance must now be monitored.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – PSG and CWG Comments

Appendix 2 – Education Project Report

Previous committee reports are available at: [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/committees](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/committees)

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