

Committee	Dated:
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee	15052017
Subject: Management of the Highgate and Hampstead Ponds	Public
Report of: Bob Warnock	For Discussion
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Summary

All the Ponds in Hampstead Heath's Highgate and Hampstead valleys have changed ecologically through the recent Ponds Project. This report outlines the intended ecological management of these ponds following these changes; further details are provided in Appendix 1.

Recommendation

- Members of are invited to submit their views on the proposals.

Main Report

Background

1. The Ponds Project has resulted in changes to most of the major ponds on the Heath. It is therefore timely to review how these ponds are to be managed.

Current Position

2. The most significant ecological changes are the installation of about two hectares of wetland vegetation along edges of the ponds. This will provide important wildlife habitat of a kind which was formerly rather lacking on the Heath. New pools and scrapes at the Ladies Pond and Bird Sanctuary will also enrich the Heath's ecology. Turf used on the new spillways and the Boating Pond dam contains a wide variety of wild flowers, but the potential of this to provide additional wildlife habitat is limited by the requirement that these areas be mown relatively frequently, as well as the heavy public use that most will sustain.

Proposals

3. The ponds and associated habitats will continue to be monitored throughout the growing season. This is especially important in the establishment phase of 1-2 years, so that any remedial action can be undertaken if required.

4. It is a requirement of the Supervising Engineer that grass on most of the dams and spillways is mown several times a year. This will limit the landscape and ecological value of these areas.
5. Once well established, the marginal vegetation round the ponds will need to be cut, for example an eighth annually. In the longer term some or all of it may need to be dredged to prevent the marginal vegetation from drying out.
6. A detailed baseline survey of water quality is proposed in 2020 or soon afterwards, to allow comparisons to be made with one carried out before the Ponds Project started.
7. Management of the Boating Pond Island is under discussion, as detailed in a separate report. The options range from full public access to keeping it all out of bounds as a wildlife refuge.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

8. The City has a legal duty under the Hampstead Heath Act 1871 to maintain the natural aspect of the Heath. There is a reputational risk in not pro-actively managing the natural aspect of the Heath. Left unchecked the mosaic of diverse habitats for which the Heath is renowned would be lost.
9. Activities included within the Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan will be undertaken using the Heath local risk budgets.
10. The proposals link to the theme in the Community Strategy to protect, promote and enhance our environment. They also link 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'.
11. These works also fulfil Essential Actions in the Part 1 Management Plan, including to retain and enhance the Heath's habitats and natural resources to enable continued quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world by its visitors.

Financial Implications

12. The proposed baseline survey of water quality to be carried out in 2020 or soon after will need to be carried out by consultants, and a funding stream will need to be identified. The water quality surveys undertaken before the Ponds Project started cost £54,000. It should not be necessary to repeat the full suite of investigations, which will reduce the cost of resurveying. We estimate this will cost in the region of £30,000.

Conclusion

13. The main ponds on the Heath and their associated habitats require detailed management. Pre-existing tasks are already listed in the 2017 Annual Work Programme and Projects Plan, but those now required as a result of the Ponds Project are only summarised there. This report identifies the additional tasks resulting from the Ponds Project in more detail.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Management of the Highgate and Hampstead Ponds

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