

Policy for Bench Dedications and Sponsorships at Hampstead Heath

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1 Introduction

This policy updates the current position on the dedication and sponsorship of benches on Hampstead Heath in light of a review of the existing 'memorial bench' scheme conducted throughout 2016 and 2017.

Hampstead Heath holds many positive associations with peace and tranquillity, connection with nature, cherished memories and enhanced health and wellbeing (Heath Community Vision survey July 2017). Provision of a high quality bench dedication and sponsorship service provides a unique opportunity for members of the public to commemorate loved ones or special occasions and to create a lasting connection with the Heath.

This policy aims to address:

- The increasing numbers of requests for bench dedications anticipated in the future in response to increased visitor engagement and connection to the Heath.
- The issue of aging bench furniture across the body of the Heath and as a means of covering costs of maintenance, replacement and upgrade of the Heath furniture on a sustainable basis.
- The administrative costs of delivering a high quality bench dedication service to enable it to become self-funding in the longer term.
- The longer term opportunity to raise donations towards the provision of visitor services more broadly in the future.

2 Background

There is a long tradition of dedicating benches on the Heath dating back to the 1970s and, today, many benches that pre-date 1995 are reaching the end of their serviceable life.

A gradual increase in demand for bench dedications over time led to the introduction of an informal cap on the total number of benches and their locations which remains in place today. This is consistent with the responsibility to preserve the 'natural aspect' of the Heath in accordance with the Hampstead Heath Act 1871 and with the policy to maintain the rural and wild aesthetic of the Heath.

This policy sets out a procedure for the effective management of existing bench stock and bench sponsorships across the Heath. In particular it sets out clear measures for addressing the renewal or re-dedication of existing benches sensitively and fairly.

3 Hampstead Heath Bench Dedication Service

A dedicated bench on Hampstead Heath is a popular way to commemorate a loved one or to celebrate a special occasion.

The bench dedication service offers sponsorship of a bench to commemorate people or occasions consistent with the charitable aims and rural aesthetic of Hampstead Heath and consistent with the principles and guidance set out in this policy.

The service aims to administer bench dedications fairly and transparently recognising that there is a limit to the number of benches available and that these have a limited lifespan.

Dedication of a bench will provide a sustainable and robust timber seat with an inscribed dedication routed into the timber of the seat back. The bench will be dedicated for ten years after which we will contact the sponsor to offer a possible extension (at further charge) prior to offering the bench to the applicants on the waiting list for re-dedication/replacement.

4 General Principles

Locations, number and style of benches

- 4.1 Maintain the current cap on the number and distribution of benches across the Heath and prepare and maintain a Schedule of Locations that sets out approved locations for benches. The Schedule of Locations may be updated annually to reflect annual work programmes and to incorporate any required modifications.
- 4.2 Apply a design standard to bench renewals and replacements to ensure benches are in keeping with the landscape characteristics and achieve a consistent standard. To this end, a schedule of appropriate bench styles will be developed, expanding on the current styles found across the Heath (and phasing out less desirable styles).

Sponsorships

- 4.3 Continue to implement a standard dedication period of ten years for all benches with an option for the registered sponsor to extend their sponsorship on a ten yearly cycle (at the published fee).
- 4.4 Benches will be sourced and purchased by The City of London and will comply with the bench style and standard set out in the Schedule of Locations.
- 4.5 The inscribed dedication will be produced and installed by the City of London. This must comply with the style guide and limits on the number of words in the inscription and will be subject to the approval of the Superintendent.

- 4.6 Benches dedicated in memory will require the agreement of the next of kin, personal representative and/ or executor.
- 4.7 Benches will be dedicated for a period of ten years during which the scheme allows for up to one replacement due to vandalism, theft or disrepair, beyond which we do not undertake to continue to replace the bench or accept liability. Standard maintenance for Heath furniture will be applied during this time.
- 4.8 Benches will be permitted in specified locations and any variations will require the approval of the Superintendent.
- 4.9 Where demand for benches cannot be met within the specified locations applicants may choose to go on a waiting list. It will be the responsibility of the applicant to keep us informed of change of contact details.

Waiting List

- 4.10 Continue to maintain a waiting list for bench dedications and to offer benches for re-dedication as they become available. Applicants on the waiting list will be consulted in order of priority according to length of time since registering their interest on the waiting list.
- 4.11 Benches not taken up by applicants on the waiting list may be offered to the wider public for sponsorship and re-dedication.
- 4.12 We will aim to reduce the waiting list for a bench dedication to a maximum of 50 applicants and to maintain it at or below this level in future. Timely review of the waiting list cap may occur as required in response to changing demand and at the discretion of the Superintendent.

Aging bench stock and dedications prior to 1996

- 4.13 The renewal and re-dedication of benches that are reaching the end of their life span will be prioritised. The majority of benches currently on the Heath are over 20 years old and are approaching the end of their serviceable life.
- 4.14 Due to the passage of time, current contact details for past sponsors are not held for the majority of these dedications. This is further complicated by the fact that the terms and duration of past agreements are not recorded. In many instances the duration of these historic agreements was unspecified, being generally perceived to remain for the serviceable life time of the bench.
- 4.15 It is important to note that sponsorship is given for a specific bench, not the location and is therefore linked to the period of the life span of a bench. For the purpose of clarity, for benches sponsored prior to 1996, this period is recognised as 20 years, as defined and communicated in 1997, by the then Superintendent.

4.16 Recognising the sensitive nature of the removal of benches that have been dedicated in the past, every effort will be made to respect the wishes of the original sponsors and to make contact.

4.17 To this end, the following protocol is proposed for the notification of bench renewals:

4.17.1 Commence notification 12 months prior to scheduled bench renewal.

4.17.2 Offer first right of refusal for re-dedication of the bench to registered sponsor (where sponsor records are current).

4.17.3 In the event that the sponsor records are not current, a notice will be placed on the bench for a minimum of 12 months prior to the scheduled bench renewal. In addition, where appropriate, the City of London will use its website, social media and work with the local newspapers to actively seek to contact sponsors.

4.17.4 In the event that a sponsored bench is removed due to damage or being beyond economic repair prior to the sponsorship being renewed or expiry of the full 12 month notice period, a replacement bench may be installed. However, re-dedication of the bench will not be initiated until the notice period has expired, to provide the opportunity for the original sponsor to make contact.

4.17.5 Retain timber slats bearing the inscribed dedication and store securely for 2 years in the event that a sponsor wishes to claim at a later date.

4.17.6 Should a sponsor make contact following the removal of the bench and wish to sponsor a new bench every effort will be made to accommodate their wishes.

5 Fees and Payment

5.1 Prices for benches will be determined annually in line with inflation and based on the overall cost of providing the service. Proposed pricing revisions will be discussed with the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee and reported to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee annually as part of the annual report on fees and charges.

5.2 The cost of the dedicated bench will include the purchase of the bench, slat engraving, installation costs, maintenance over ten years and cost of administration of the service. Also an 'insurance' of 25% towards possible repair or renewal during its lifespan to cover for the event of vandalism, theft or disrepair (see para 4.7).

5.3 Sponsors will have the option to make a donation to the overall upkeep of the Heath.

6 Implementation and Review

- 6.1 This policy will be reviewed in line with the Hampstead Heath Management Plan with a mid-term review scheduled in 2023/24 and a complete review to be undertaken after ten years. Supporting documents and plans will be reviewed as required within this time frame.
- 6.2 The Bench Dedication Service will be implemented through the Annual Work Programme which will set out service standards, targets and outcomes on an annual cycle.
- 6.3 The Schedule of Locations will be reviewed periodically (a ten year review period is recommended to align with review of the wider Management Plan for Hampstead Heath).
- 6.4 Revise the current guidance for dedicating a bench to ensure it aligns with the wider offer across Open Spaces Department as appropriate.