

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Highgate Wood Consultative Group	9 October 2019
<b>Subject:</b> Superintendents Update – Highgate Wood	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	<b>For Discussion</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Jonathan Meares – Open Spaces Department	

### **Summary**

This Report provides an update to Members on management and operational activities in Highgate Wood since April 2019. The report describes progress on the Roman Kiln Project, sustainability, conservation and woodland management, infrastructure and facilities.

### **Recommendations**

- That the views of the Highgate Wood Consultative Group be conveyed to the Hampstead Heath Highgate Wood & Queen’s Park Committee at their meeting on 13 November 2019.

### **Main Report**

#### **Roman Kiln Project update.**

1. The Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln (FOHRK) are continuing their work towards submitting a grant application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NHLF). FOHRK held a well-attended fund-raising evening at the Highgate Wood Pavilion Café on the 5 July 2019 attended by key partners in the project. The charity group are now focusing on submitting a capital grant application to City Bridge Trust to cover the costs of the extension of the information building, the restoration and installation of the kiln and the interpretation material. FOHRK have delayed the application to NHLF in order to await confirmation from City Bridge Trust, and plan to submit their application in May 2020.
2. The Highgate Wood Manager is currently obtaining final costings for the extension and conversion of the information building, planning application requirements and the role of City Surveyors Department.

#### **Green Flag and Green Heritage**

3. Highgate Wood had their Green Flag and Green Heritage judging on 7 June 2019. The judges were impressed with the emphasis on ecological and conservation management of the woodland and the management approach to the increasing popularity of Forest Schools and outdoor classroom activities. Highgate Wood will be focusing on replacing all of the 30 year old signage that

is now in poor repair and have just installed the first replacement using an English oak framed noticeboard, at Onslow Gate.

### **Sustainability**

4. The changes to the Divisional Waste and Recycling operation have shown some positive outcomes over the summer period with food waste collection extended to Highgate Wood's Café facility and dog waste is now being taken directly to Edmonton's waste to energy plant by the Heath's Waste and Recycling Team.
5. The focus now is on increasing recycling volumes from the current general waste stream and reducing the overall costs to the Division. Alongside this work there will also be a communications campaign to encourage visitors to take their litter home with them and recycle at home.

### **Woodland Conservation and Tree Management**

6. Unusually for mid-summer, Highgate Wood was hit by high winds and rain on the 10 August, and experienced a number of branch failures, all of which were hornbeams, but fortunately no major failures. The wood was closed until wind speeds subsided and the team managed to open the site for the last couple of hours at the end of the day. The weather patterns over the last two to three years appear to be changing with increasing frequency of spring storms rather than the autumn.
7. The results from this year's oak decline survey indicated relative stability with 6 trees reported dead this year, of which 4 were previously recorded in gradual decline, and a further 2 oaks uprooted, one this year, and one last year in October. One of the major changes over the last 5 years is the lack of tortrix moth defoliation which was extensive in previous years and a contributory factor to decline in a number of the trees badly affected.
8. It has been an unusually abundant summer for seed and fruit, with hornbeam, oak, rowan, crab apple all producing large quantities of seeds and fruits. Insect numbers were variable this year, possibly due to the wetter cooler period during August. The moth trapping sessions this season indicated high numbers of species, and the results will be written up later this autumn.
9. Bird and bat numbers were mixed this summer with the Sparrowhawks breeding successfully again this year and increased numbers of blue tit, great tit and nuthatch during the bird nesting season, but bat numbers are down in the most recent September survey which is disappointing.

### **Volunteer activity for 2018/19**

10. Following the summer holiday period, the Heath Hands sessions have resumed in Highgate Wood with pulling thistle from the meadow area on the southern edge of the sport's field, and bramble and holly clearance from planted tree and shrub whips in Conservation Area 5 near the Onslow Gate. The volunteers have also been cutting holly to reinforce the dead hedge through the middle of the bluebells.
11. The Heath Hands volunteering sessions in Highgate Wood are well attended and provide an interesting insight into woodland management in a busy open space. They are an important component of the cyclical management of the

conservation areas, and the Highgate Wood Team are very grateful for the commitment and generosity of those attending.

### **Tree disease and biosecurity issues**

12. Highgate Wood and Hampstead Heath were very fortunate to be selected by the Forestry Commission to trial a new target-based approach to Oak Processionary Moth control this year. In Highgate Wood biological pesticide spraying was restricted to the playground only, followed by nest removal in the remaining areas identified as high use, including the field edge and area around the Pavilion Café. It is hoped that the greatly reduced spraying operation will have minimised and collateral damage to other lepidoptera species. Nest removal was also carried out in the woodland areas used by Forest Schools. Nest numbers were slightly up on last year at 110 nests of which 88 were removed. The remaining nests are outside the target areas but will be monitored.
13. The Forestry Commission will be holding an OPM workshop in early October with an update on the spread of the moth this year, and also assessing the success of the small number of sites that have been trialling the target based approach, including Highgate Wood and Hampstead Heath.

### **Pavilion Café update**

14. The Superintendent presented a report to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee on the 11 September providing an update on the Highgate Wood Pavilion Café. This report forms part of the meeting agenda pack.

### **Forest Schools and events**

15. A number of recent enquiries relating to the use of the Wood on a daily basis for forest school activities, have been directed towards making Event Applications. In addition, the existing Forest Schools operating in the Wood are also being directed towards completing Event Applications. These will initially be considered by the Officer Event Group. Taking account of the frequency Forest Schools use the Wood it is likely they will be classified as Major Events. Consequently, the Superintendent will discuss the applications with the Consultative Group as set out in the Highgate Wood Events Policy Part 2.
16. Alongside the engagement activity and licencing there will also be a ecological monitoring programme of the designated sites for forest school activity, to determine levels of impact, using photographic records and metrics on species and soil condition.
17. This year's Community Heritage Day was another success with very good weather and slightly higher than normal visitor numbers. There was a Climate Change theme to this year's event with a number of stalls representing Population Matters and Extinction Rebellion.

### **Sports Field**

18. The wet changeable weather has impacted on the cricket season and a number of matches have had to be cancelled as a result. One of our regular teams the

Metro Cricket Club, who are a partially sighted and blind Team, have had an excellent season reaching a tournament final and doing well in their league. The pitch is being carefully managed and collaborative working with the Heath Sports and Recreation Keepers to carry out end of season renovation works.

19. With the increase in fees this year one of the long-standing football teams have complained about the condition of the field and asked for concessionary rate. The Highgate Wood Manager has written to the team and explained that the new charges are non-negotiable, but that the City of London Corporation will commission an independent assessment of the pitches by the Institute of Groundsman.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

20. The activities and projects included within this report contribute to the three objectives and outcomes set out in the Open Spaces Business Plan 2019-20 (a) Open spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible, (b) Spaces enrich people's lives and (c) Business practices are responsible and sustainable.
21. These activities and projects also contribute towards the achievement of the three aims set out in the City of London Corporation Corporate Plan 2018-23. Contribute to a flourishing society (1-4), Support a thriving economy (5) and Shape outstanding environments (9-12).

### **Financial Implications**

22. The operational requirements highlighted in the report will be met from the Superintendent's Local Risk Budget.

### **Conclusion**

23. Despite some variable weather conditions Highgate Wood has had a successful spring and summer with an extended late summer warm spell. The focus for the next 6 months will be progressing the Roman Kiln Project to HLF application stage, the autumn Heath Hands sessions, and the installation of more replacement noticeboards. There will also be a focus on regulating the forest school activities in Highgate Wood through new licencing procedures.

### **Appendices**

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