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| Committee(s): | Date(s): | Item no. |
| Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee | 6 th November 2012 | |
| Subject: Review of Annual Work Programme 2012 | Public | |
| Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath | For Discussion | |
| <p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>The report below provides a review of the management operations and activities carried out on Hampstead Heath over the past 12 months as part of the 2012 Annual Work Programme, and to consider the new 2013 Work Programme appended to this report.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>That the Consultative Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Notes the work undertaken during 2012 to enhance the natural aspect and designed landscapes within the Heath. b) provides its views on the proposed 2013 Annual Work plan appended to this report. | | |

Main Report

Background

1. Hampstead Heath is a complex mosaic of different habitats, comprising extensive areas of grassland and secondary woodland, hedgerows, water bodies, streams, a raised bog, heathland and formal areas. It is also extremely popular and well used. These factors make it complex to manage.
2. The Interim Management Policy Plan for the Heath states, in Policy 6, that the City will draw together an annual work plan for the Heath in consultation with local groups and interested parties. The Annual Work Plan 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.
3. For completeness the major tasks within the formal areas of the Heath have also been included within the Annual Work Plan.

Review of the 2012 Annual Work Programme

4. The following section sets out in some detail the extensive work that has been undertaken in maintaining and monitoring the complex landscape of the Heath.

Arboriculture and Veteran Trees

- The Hampstead Heath Tree team has undergone a restructure with a new Team Leader and Arborist all joining the team over the last 12 months. The task of creating a new team has been very effectively and professionally managed by the Tree Management Officer, and we hope to return the team to full strength before Christmas.
- The Team have continued their rolling programme of management work on the current tranche of Veteran trees, assisted by the Conservation team.
- During the spring the team identified the disease *Massaria* on a London Plane tree in Queen's Park. Subsequently the team have discovered a number of other trees affected by the same disease within the various avenues and plantings of London Plane on Hampstead Heath. *Massaria* of Plane is a fungal disease with an aggressive and rapid pathology, and is now widespread in the London area. Fortunately the disease does not kill the host tree but effects the lower lateral branches, and with good management can be controlled. Virtually all the Plane trees on Hampstead Heath are located at busy access points, often close to highways and facilities, which has necessitated the tree team to focus on inspections and removal of any suspected limbs, and consequently other tree work has had to be postponed. The team have now completed most of the work and are able to return to other priority works.
- Tree risk management and inspections is a critical component of the tree team's work and due to the urgent deployment action following the discovery of *Massaria*, an external Consultant was commissioned to continue the programmed work of plotting the priority areas within the green zone or medium risk areas across the site. This work will enable the tree team to carry out the tree condition surveys more effectively.
- 2012 was another year marked by several storm events resulting in a number of tree failures. The most severe weather event occurred in early June with a rare episode of high winds and rain resulting in a number of significant tree related incidents on the Hampstead Heath and Queen's Park.

Nature Conservation Work

- This year has been an exceptionally challenging year for the Conservation Team, having to work through record rainfall during June and July resulting in considerable disruption to their core work. With the saturated ground conditions machinery could only be used with great caution to avoid damage to the ground. This coupled with a change of green waste disposal arrangements necessitating sourcing a new site to remove the considerable volume of compostable material, created some logistical problems which have now been resolved.
- The grass cutting operations this year have had to be reduced due to these factors, but plans are already moving forward to change to more traditional hay making techniques for the 2013 season with the purchase of new equipment to bail the grassland areas following cutting.

Community Outreach Work and the City Bridge Trust Project

- This has been a very successful and productive year for the City Bridge Trust Project with the development of an educational garden facility adjacent to Kenwood Nursery Staff yard (see Figure 1 below) alongside heathland restoration work and control of invasive species, all involving Heath Hands.



Figure 1: New pond under construction at Kenwood Nursery Yard as part of CBT project

- In addition to our regular programme of Heath Hands volunteer sessions the Conservation Team were also able to accommodate a number of work experience placements this year, as well as young people working towards their Duke of Edinburgh award and also in collaboration with the princes trust scheme.
- We have also been developing links and supporting local community based projects through advice and provision of waste by-products generated by operations undertaken on the Heath, such as, woodchips, leaf mould, timber and other re-cycled materials.

Control of Invasive Species

- Himalayan balsam has been prolific this season due to high germination rates, necessitating a targeted and systematic approach, working down the Fleet stream catchment and along other riparian areas. Additional sessions were added to Heath Hands work programme, which has greatly assisted our control programme this year.
- Continued control of Giant hogweed using stem injection techniques.
- The extent of yellow balsam control was extended this year across the Heath again with the assistance from the Heath hands volunteers.
- Bracken spread continues to be managed using carefully applied chemical spraying in the West Heath and Sandy Heath areas. We will only be using non-chemical procedures such as rolling for the foreseeable future due to the withdrawal of the chemical Asulox from the market.
- The conservation team have been targeting the small isolated pockets of Japanese Knotweed across the Heath, and is now using a more precise and effective injection system,
- Rodents were particularly visible during the spring and summer season, possibly due to high rainfall and raised ground water levels. This generated a great deal of public concern and due to this the team deployed additional control measures across the site, which appears to have been effective in controlling the rat population.
- Thistles and Ragwort continue to be a problem with areas being cut at various locations during July which has had limited success. We will be looking at more intensive management operations next year to control these two species. Options being considered include the use of Cinnabar moths and the ragwort flea-beetle as a natural biological control. More frequent cutting may help control thistles, and this will be tried on Parliament Hill.
- Areas of Californian brome, Michaelmas daisy, Canadian goldenrod and Russian comfrey have been repeatedly cut and/or dug up to reduce their vigour and prevent seeding.

Woodland Management and Hedges

- Hedgerows were laid at the back of the Drying Ground on the edge of West Heath, along the First and Third Hedge lines in the Parliament Field area, and the Heath Extension. This work provides crucial undisturbed habitat for nesting birds and is part of a rolling programme of restoring historic boundary hedges.
- A new hedgerow was planted along the perimeter wall of the Hill garden which was sadly vandalised and pulled up within 24 hours of planting.
- Supplementary planting was undertaken to some existing hedgerows, both to fill gaps and diversify the species range.
- On-going programme of volunteer sessions directed by the conservation team to remove non-native tree saplings at various wooded location on the Heath. With particular focus within areas of secondary woodland adjacent to the Spaniards Road.
- Coppicing and laying of the shrub islands at Parliament Hill and the on the causeway at the Men's Pond.
- The collection of 30 oak saplings from around the Heath for potting up and transfer to Northern Ireland for planting.
- The ecologist
- has carried out a condition survey of the Heath's extensive network of hedges, identifying areas where restoration work is required. A student volunteer assisted with the work. Data will be analysed over the winter months.
- In February we took delivery of approximately 250 micro propagated Dutch elm disease resistant Elm tree saplings. Working in partnership with the Conservation Foundation and as part of the 'Ulmus Londinium' and Great British Elm experiment projects, we will be distributing these trees to schools and other local community groups during the winter.
- The Conservation team carried out selected holly removal around the veteran trees in South Meadow as part of the CBT programme of veteran tree management.
- Extensive plantings of native bulbs at the Whitestone garden.
- On-going restoration of the old orchard at Springett's Wood through additional planting of old fruit tree varieties.
- Removal of sycamores and subsequent re-planting with native whips within the shelterbelt adjacent to Springett's Wood.

Heathland, Bog, and Wetland Areas

- An area next to the Viaduct Bridge was planted up with heather plugs following the removal of a storm damaged oak tree.

- The area of Gorse was expanded on the West Heath at Sandy Heath involving coppicing and planting seedlings raised Kenwood Nursery. This work was carried out as part of the City Bridge Trust programme involving the Heath Hands Volunteers
- Heather patch near the middle gate to the Hill Garden weeded and improved.
- Heather patch close to Pitt's Garden has been improved by selective thinning of existing birch and pine trees to improve light levels
- Continued vegetation management at the West Heath valley mire site.

Grassland Management

- Four new annual and perennial wildflower areas were created this spring. Two composed of cornfield annuals, located on the Heath Extension and Duke's Meadow (see figure 2 below). The two perennial wildflower areas were located on the higher areas of the Heath, at the old Hockey pitch and behind the old dump site. The Old Hockey Pitch site has developed successfully, but the seed at the other perennial meadow did not germinate well. It was re-seeded in early October. One area of sunflowers was seeded for the local bee keepers association to provide additional forage for bees.



Figure 2: Annual wild flower meadow at Duke's Field

- Successful conclusion of the R.S.P.B. house sparrow project.
- Work was undertaken to expand the acid grassland at the 'Tormentil Slopes' at the Vale of Health by removal of bramble and tree cover.

This has already led to an expansion of the tormentil population. An experiment to increase the spread further was carried out by spreading tormentil prunings containing ripe seed onto the newly cleared area.

- As with previous years the team have continued to manage the spread of bramble with existing areas cut back to agreed boundaries recognising their value as habitat.

Paths and Erosion Issues.

- A new path surface has been constructed on the West Heath using materials which are geologically similar and sympathetic to the surrounding landscape.
- Monitoring for the potential development of bare eroded footpaths across grasslands and halting the development of these through the cutting of alternative desire routes to distribute foot traffic and subsequent compaction.
- De-compaction and diversion of paths that have developed under veteran trees.
- Restoration of a number of informal paths through wooded areas achieved via the removal of accumulated mud and detritus, with the aim of reducing erosion and compaction to veteran trees as a result of foot traffic.
- Serious erosion issues to open grassland areas have been addressed with the removal and repair of some informal paths.(boating pond and cross country route)
- Work has continued to improve drainage alongside existing paths and also to reduce gullying at various locations on bound gravel surfaces.
- A number of other small repairs were carried out at various locations.
- The path adjacent to the boating pond has been re-laid.

Ponds

- Expansion of pond edge habitat through the lifting, and thinning of existing trees along the margins of the Highgate and Hampstead chains of ponds. This forms part of the dam's vegetation management programme currently being implemented on the site.
- Installation of dams along catchments to slow water flow and improve the conservation value of ditches.
- Replacement of the vegetated island at the Vale of Health .
- Improvements to the marginal edges of the Ladies pond through clearance and additional planting.
- As mentioned in the above section on the control of invasive species the conservation team continue to work closely with the Hampstead Heath Angling Society on various projects to improve the fishing environment.

- Several fishing workshops were held during the summer, raising the profile of angling and promoting recreational benefits.
- Regular removal and checking for rubbish, snags and discarded fishing tackle in all the ponds.
- Some judicious coppicing has taken place to trees along the marginal edges of a number of the ponds. This has proved to be very adventitious to the amphibian population due to increased light levels along the all-important warm marginal edges.
- The Ecology team continued to monitor the amphibian populations on the Heath. A student was involved with newt monitoring in 2012. 5 volunteers received training on newt ecology in liaison with the nearby Glebelands nature reserve.
- Creation of a new pond to be used by school groups for pond dipping at the Kenwood educational garden.
- New ephemeral pools were dug at Springett's wood.

Wildlife Welfare

- Some supplementary feeding of wildfowl during extended frozen periods.
- Songbird feeding stations have been maintained at Kenwood, the Ladies Pond and the Bird Sanctuary.
- The successful capture, rehabilitation and release of injured birds and other wildlife was undertaken, working with the zoo at Golder's Hill.

Managing Water Quality

- During the summer period monitoring of oxygen levels was essential to maintain adequate water quality. Aeration equipment was deployed on the Viaduct and Swan ponds as a precautionary measure. Rapid deployment of oxygenation equipment to the ponds is essential if dissolved oxygen levels fall below a critical level, therefore reducing the risk of a fish kill incident.
- This monitoring is a core part of the Ecology Team's work.
- Fortunately this year there has been no further evidence of the Azolla outbreak that occurred in 2010 at the Viaduct Pond.
- Both the water aeration and mixing equipment were given a complete overhaul at the Boating pond.
- Barley straw was again positioned in some of the swimming ponds to reduce the likelihood of blue green algae blooms.
- Regular removal of blanket weed at the Whitestone pond.
- Slit traps have been placed in a number of locations along ditches within the pond catchments to help reduce sedimentation.
- Continuous monitoring of catchments leading from developments and private residences for pollution and unlawful discharge incidents.

Habitat and Species Monitoring and Planning

- Four volunteers continued to carry out reptile surveys across the Heath in liaison with the ecology team. This continues the successful surveys carried out in 2011 which recorded 5 times as many snake sightings than the previous year.



Figure 3: Grass snakes

- The experiment to compare the effects of grassland cutting times continued on the wild flower area on the Extension, with three different regimes. The area was monitored.
- Grassland monitoring including Small Tumulus Field, the Sparrows Site, the ‘Tormentil Slopes’ and acid grassland above the Vale of Health. Selected areas of creeping thistle, common hogweed and bracken were also monitored. Data will be analysed over the winter months.
- The Butterfly transect that has been running successfully for thirty one years indicated a hard year for a number of species due to the poor weather.

- Bat surveys were carried out on the Hampstead and Highgate pond chains in areas likely to be affected by the forthcoming flood and water management work.
- The Ecology Team produced three Compartment Management Plans, for Sandy Heath Ponds, Sandy Heath and Flagstaff Gorse Patches, and Pryor's Field.
- Quarterly walks were held with the Heath Subcommittee of the Heath and Hampstead Society.

Formal Areas

Golders Hill Park / Pergola & Hill Garden / Keats House

- Design, planting and establishment of sustainable and structured plants in the Wall Garden – Figure 4 & 5.
- Replanting of shrub borders following phase three wall repairs in the Hill Garden.
- Installation of shade canopy and new play equipment in the children's play area.
- Additional sustainable planting in Keats House.
- Creation of natural grass habitats in the Swan Pond.
- Reed control in the Water Garden Pond.

Parliament Hill Fields

- Completion of landscape improvement works in the front of the Lido and Education Centre.



Figure 4: Front border Golders Hill Park



Figure 5: Front border Golders Hill Park

Corporate & Strategic Implications

5. The protection of the natural aspect cannot be taken for granted and to retain the existing mosaic of vegetation that makes the Heath such a

popular open space, whilst fulfilling the basic services to keep the site clean and well maintained, requires significant investment.

6. The preparation and implementation of an Annual Work Plan in accordance with Policy 6 of the Interim Management Plan contributes to the strategic theme of A Clean, Pleasant and Attractive City. The natural aspect is a significant factor in the popularity of the Heath for general recreation and sport and this also helps to contribute towards A Healthy City.
7. The actions for the new annual work plan are set out under the main character areas of the Heath. This follows the format of the proposed Part III section of the management plan, detailed prescriptions of work. What is ultimately required for each of these character areas is a clear vision on and long term aspirations together with those policies that are relevant to these areas, that will be taken from the Part I overriding strategic direction and Part II policies for each Topic Area.

Implications

8. The costs of meeting this ambitious programme are funded through the Superintendents' local risk budgets, together with the grant funding from City Bridge Trust. Wherever possible opportunities are sought for external funding to support these essential works.

Conclusion

9. The Heath is a complex site and it is impossible to set out in full all the work required to manage it a year ahead. Unanticipated circumstances may require a change of priorities, such as storms. However, the plan establishes our intentions for the year, subject to the Committee's comments.

Background Papers:

Committee Report - Sustainable Planting - Golders Hill Park

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