

HAMPSTEAD HEATH, HIGHGATE WOOD AND QUEEN'S PARK COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 24 February 2021

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee (https://youtu.be/_RVRzzbAgRg) held on Wednesday, 24 February 2021 at 4.00 pm

Present

Members:

Anne Fairweather (Chair)
Karina Dostalova (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy David Bradshaw
Alderman Prem Goyal
Alderman Gregory Jones QC
Deputy Edward Lord
Wendy Mead
Ruby Sayed
Deputy John Tomlinson
William Upton QC
Yianni Andrews (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)
John Beyer (Heath & Hampstead Society)
Chris Byers (English Heritage)
Richard Cornelius (London Borough of Barnet)
Caroline Haines (Ex-Officio Member)
Oliver Sells QC (Ex-Officio Member)

In attendance:

David Humphries - Tree Management Officer, Hampstead Heath

Officers:

Colin Buttery - Director of Open Spaces
Bob Warnock - Superintendent of Hampstead Heath
Katherine Radusin - PA to Superintendent of Hampstead Heath
Alison Bunn - Head of Facilities Management, City Surveyor's Department
Mark Jarvis - Head of Finance, Chamberlain's Department
Gerry Kiefer - Department Business Manager, Open Spaces Department
Richard Gentry - Constabulary and Queen's Park Manager, Hampstead Heath
Declan Gallagher - Operational Services Manager, Hampstead Heath
Jonathan Meares - Highgate Wood, Conservation & Trees Manager
Yvette Hughes - Business Manager, Hampstead Heath
Paul Maskell - Leisure and Events Manager, Hampstead Heath
Leanne Murphy - Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Michael Hudson and Adeline Siew Yin Au.

2. **MEMBERS DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA**

There were none.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the public minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2021 were approved as a correct record.

4. **HAMPSTEAD HEATH CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

The draft public minutes of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee (HHCC) meeting held on 25 January 2021 were received.

5. **FRONT LINE WORK UPDATE**

Members received a verbal update from David Humphries, Tree Management Officer for Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park, providing a front-line worker perspective on the issues experienced concerning tree management.

Members were advised that the pandemic had directly impacted the Tree Teams work. The Heath is very heavily compacted in areas, which was impacting on soil health and the ecology it supports. Members were shown pictures of stock fencing around trees, which has been installed to help reduce soil compaction.

After 35 years working at the Heath, the Tree Officer highlighted that he had never seen the Heath used as heavily as it has been throughout the pandemic. There had also been a noticeable seasonal change in recent years and these issues were also having a subsequent impact on the health of the soil and environments. Compaction of soil would be an ongoing issue and legacy of the impact was not yet fully understood by Officers.

It was noted that tree inspection surveys were now up to date. It was estimated that 11% of the Heath's veteran trees had been lost over the last 18 years. There are 470 veteran trees, compared to 530 recorded during a 2002 study. There had also been an increase in tree failures during 2020, with 110 failures recorded, compared to the mean average of 70 a year.

A Member questioned if soil compaction and tree failure was a result of climate change or the recent pandemic impact. Members were informed that the pandemic had had a significant impact, but Officers were also carrying out more ecology work concerning urban heat from climate change.

With respect to the protection of veteran trees, a Member recommended using dead hedging instead of fencing. Members were advised that dead hedging had been traditionally used around individual trees, but sadly instances of arson had led to more damage. Dead hedging was used as a short-term option and new options such as chestnut pale fencing and semi-permanent stock fencing would be used.

6. **ANNUAL REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Members considered a report of the Town Clerk concerning the Committee's Terms of Reference.

RESOLVED - That:-

- the Terms of Reference of the Committee, subject to any comments, be approved for submission to the Court in April 2021 as set out in the appendix; and
- any further changes in the lead up to the Court's appointment of Committees be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chair.

7. **SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE**

Members considered a report of the Superintendent providing an update on matters concerning Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park. The following points were made:

- The Superintendent recognised the incredible effort from staff since Christmas, particularly in light of the recent mild weather and earlier snow.
- The recently announced Government roadmap will allow the Team to plan the reopening of sports activities from 29 March and timetable events from 21 June. It was highlighted that the key role of Open Spaces would remain, especially at Easter and during the summer, as people were being encouraged not to holiday abroad.

Contractors & Maintenance

- Ground recovery works will be undertaken by staff during the spring and autumn. An 8-week programme of gas supply works will take place at Parliament Hill, starting in late spring; A 8-week programme of resurfacing and drainage works at the East Heath Car Park would commence in early April.
- With regards to the gas supply works, a Member cautioned Officers regarding contractors taking space for storage, etc, as the City Corporation had unhappy experiences with this in past. It was recommended that use to contractors be time and space limited. Officers confirmed the contractor had been made aware the Car Park was vital to generating income to support the Heath Charity. A compound would be in place for 8 weeks only and a fee would be charged.
- Officers were pleased to report that recent drainage investigations had located the location of the Lido leak. Works to replace the pipework were being undertaken and thanks were given to the City Surveyor's Department for their ongoing assistance in resolving the leak.

Planning

- The Superintendent updated Members on the following planning application:
 - **Cranwood Development (Haringey).** Officers attended a Development Forum hosted by the London Borough of Haringey. Following the Forum, Officers met with representatives from Haringey and the developer and had submitted written representations. Officers will continue to engage prior to a planning application submission.

Hampstead Heath Events Programme 2021-22

- Members were informed that the ongoing COVID pandemic had made it incredibly difficult as the lack of certainty for event organisers meant they were unable to make applications as normal. The Officer Event Group will continue to take a flexible approach and will work with event organisers to facilitate events where possible under the current restrictions.
- The Night of 10k Personal Bests event has been cancelled for 2021.
- The English National Cross Country will not take place in March 2021, due to the current restrictions. Ongoing dialogue is taking place with regards to an alternative event date in November 2021.
- The Heart walk is celebrating its 60th anniversary and a provisional date of 11 July was confirmed pending a risk assessment.
- The planned May date for the Race for Life event was postponed and would hopefully take place on 21 August.
- The Discussions are ongoing with the Showman's Guild regarding a longer Whitsun Fair, owing to the 2021 Easter Fair being cancelled.
- The Affordable Art Fair event organisers are currently planning for September dates and Zippos Circus is planned to go ahead on 18-24 October.
- The Leisure and Events Manager provided an overview of a possible new event, the Hideaway Cinema. Consideration was being given to a five-day outdoor cinema event located on the Lido field in early September 2021.
- The Chair felt the events were a balancing act as the Heath had lost income but there was a risk of damage to the Heath by visitors. The ticketing basis of these events would provide surety on the numbers expected.

Swimming

- Officers confirmed that capital funding had been secured for a project concerning accessibility, safety and security at the three Bathing Ponds and Lido and this was progressing to Gateway 2.
- With regards to the proposed operating arrangements for the 2021 summer season. Officers have prepared draft arrangements and have consulted with the Heath swimming community, Members of the Sports Advisory Forum and the HHCC. A draft outline of the proposals, which remain subject to further Government Guidance, are set out in appendix 1. Officers continued to work towards a planned re-opening date of 29 March. It is proposed to also open the Mixed Bathing Pond from 29 March to provide additional swimming capacity.
- The Chair confirmed the swim season would be reviewed annually and Members approved the draft swimming arrangements for 2021.

Highgate Wood

- It was noted that despite the stay local message to the public, Muswell Hill Road was regularly lined with cars from visitors driving to the Wood. The number of visitors has also increased due to the pandemic. Staff are preparing for 29 March and have a programme of ground restoration work to undertake.
- With regard to unprecedented numbers, a Member queried whether the Wood had reached a point of too many visitors. Members were advised that approximately a million people were visiting annually. A number of Conservation Areas are currently fenced off, but Staff have reported a number of new desire lines opening up during the pandemic. The Chair stated that people had found new Open Spaces during the pandemic and there were campaigns for more Open Spaces in London.

Queen's Park

- Officers confirmed that there were damage and compaction concerns at the Park, as well as some recent flooding. The Friends of Queen's Park were meeting this weekend to discuss projects at the Park. A draft plan for the Woodland Walk project was being reviewed locally.

RESOLVED – That Members agree in principle the Swimming arrangements for 2021 (appendix 1) as set out in para 17.

8. FEES AND CHARGES 2021-22 & 2022-23

Members considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces setting out the proposed fees and charges for a range of sports and services provided at Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park for 2021-22 and the proposed fees and charges for Weddings and Civil Ceremonies for 2022-23.

The Chair noted that an email had been received from Catherine West MP expressing concern regarding bringing the Bathing Ponds Concession Season Ticket charges in line with a 40% discount on the adult rate.

Members were informed that the Retail Price Index for November 2020, 1.3%, was being applied to the majority of the fees and charges for 2021-22. The hourly car parking charges were being increased above inflation but remained lower than the local benchmarks. It was noted that concessions offered a 40% discount on the adult rate, and the need for Bathing Pond Concession Season Ticket charges to be increase to align with the 40% discount had been identified as part of the March 2020 Swim Review.

Members made the following comments:

- A Member supported the recommendation and felt the increase was reasonable as all Departments were expected to make 12% savings.
- In response to a query concerning the charges for Professional Dog Walking Licences, Members were advised that a pro rata rate would be applied.
- A Member was surprised that charges had not been rounded. Officers advised that the majority of payments were being made via contactless and card payments, and that there would be a lesser impact from providing change. As the majority of charges were being increased by 1.3% rounding of the charges would result in a greater charge increase and it was agreed to keep precise rates.
- Members considered the 5% charge for Forest Schools to be reasonable.
- A Member noted that an annual swimming update would be prepared for consideration at the May meeting of the Committee and felt uncomfortable making a decision on the swimming fees now as they had not appreciated the concession issue. It was felt £9.97 was a large increase and the percentages masked the figures.
- Another Member highlighted the need to remain open and accessible to all and felt the increases would impact low income and vulnerable users. The Member consequently did not support the increase due to the current challenging period. The Chair reminded Members that the uplift was in line with the decision made by the Committee in March 2020 as the City Corporation offered a 40% concession in all other areas. The Member noted that they raised this objection to the March decision and formally still objected.
- The Chair acknowledged the dissent voiced by some Members regarding the 40% concession rate, but that Members approved the other recommended fees.

- Members discussed the options to raise the Bathing Pond Concession Season Ticket rate by inflation (1.3%) or to bring it in line with the 40% concessional rate across the City Corporation's Open Spaces. A Member did not think a vote was justified as the rates were modest and it was unfair to the other Open Spaces who were all suffering huge income pressures. Another Member felt balance was needed and that Members needed to understand the impact.
- Officers confirmed it had been an extremely difficult year with huge income losses, but the City Corporation had continually made the choice throughout the year to reopen swimming when possible. The cost to provide swimming during 2020-21 would be set out in the annual Swimming review.
- The Chair proposed a vote be taken based on two proposals: to increase the Bathing Pond Concession Season Ticket rates in line with the recommendation within the report or to freeze rates until the discussion at the May meeting could take place. A ballot was cast with 10 Members in support of the original recommendation and 5 against it giving a clear majority in favour of the recommendation.
- The Chair thanked Members for their full exploration of the report and considered debate.

RESOLVED – That Members:-

- Agree the proposed fees and charges for 2021-22 as set out in Appendix 1 of this report;
- Agree the proposed Wedding and Civil Ceremony fees and charges for 2022-23 as set out in Appendix 1 of this report;
- Agree to add Housing Benefit to the Concession Rate Criteria, as set out in para 11.

9. MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Members considered a report of the Director of Open Spaces setting out the draft Divisional Plan 2021-2024 and the Conservation and Ecology Annual Work Programme (AWP) 2021-2022 for Hampstead Heath.

Members were advised that Officers had prepared the AWP in November 2020; however, projects were being reprioritised to focus more on recovery and restoration following the announcement and impacts of the third National Lockdown. Similar plans for Queen's Park and Highgate Wood were also being prepared and would come to the Committee in May.

With regards to the 150th anniversary celebrations, it was noted that a partnership statement and logo had been agreed to ensure a joined-up approach to promoting the anniversary. A Member felt that the monolith

exhibition should be used as an opportunity to promote the future and not just past.

The Director of Open Spaces noted that the anniversary was an opportunity to promote the work of the Hampstead Heath Charity and would hopefully encourage donations to support the work of the Charity. The Director also noted that people could now donate to particular projects via the City of London website.

Donations were being sought to fund works at the Model Boating Pond 'Island'. It is planned to revert the area to an island and increase aquatic planting in the channel created to support and improve the biodiversity of the area.

A Member enquired how the City Corporation would support SMEs during the upcoming café tendering process. Officers confirmed the process would start with local engagement, which would inform the tender process.

A Member felt the AWP did not adequately tackle the human impact issue on ecology and species at green spaces and queried what species monitoring was being undertaken based on species decline. Officers confirmed an innovative volunteer led bird nesting survey was completed last year and data was being collated by the Heath Ecologist. Volunteers were also identifying areas of high bird nesting activity. Volunteers from Heath Hands continue to support species monitoring.

The Superintendent added that there were a number of measures to protect ecology and biodiversity (including species monitoring) set out in the Divisional Plan; however, COVID recovery was currently the highest priority. The Conservation and Ecology AWP was set out in appendix 2 with new ground restoration works highlighted in blue.

RESOLVED – That Members:

- Agree the draft Hampstead Heath Divisional Plan 2021-2024 (appendix 1);
- Agree the draft Hampstead Heath Conservation and Ecology Annual Work Programme 2021-2022 (appendix 2).

10. **OPEN SPACES DEPARTMENT BUSINESS PLAN FOR 2021/22**

Members received a report of the Director of Open Spaces setting out the high-level Business Plan for the Open Spaces Department for 2021/22.

Members were advised that the Plan identified seven major workstreams for the whole Department together with the actions within various Corporate strategies that the Department was helping to deliver. The current Departmental risks, financial information and performance measures were also set out.

RECEIVED.

11. **CYCLICAL WORK PROGRAMME (CWP) 2021/22 UPDATED BID REPORT**

Members received a report of the City Surveyor setting out the details of projects which would be undertaken in 2021/22. In addition, an update was received regarding changes to how the CWP will operate, and be delivered, from 2022/23 onwards.

It was confirmed that Officers remain in discussion with the Chamberlain as there was an option to apply for emergency funding for health and safety related works.

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12. **REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN**

The Committee noted a report of the Town Clerk updating Members on action taken by the Town Clerk under urgency or delegated authority in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman since the last meeting of the Board, in accordance with Standing Orders No. 41 (a) and (b).

The Chair provided context for the urgency concerning Departmental and Service Committee Budget Estimates 2021/22 which followed the motion of the Committee at its last meeting resulting in budget approval.

RECEIVED.

13. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

14. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

A Member noted the death of local author and Heath resident John le Carré who was a great fan of Heath, which featured in much of his fiction. It suggested that reference to his work could be included at the 150th anniversary celebrations.

15. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED - That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

16. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2021 were approved as a correct record.

17. **NON-PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions.

18. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**

There were no items.

The meeting ended at 5.52 pm

Chairman

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