

Hampstead Heath Extension Play Area Improvements- Design Brief

April 2021

1. About the space

Before it became public open space the whole Heath Extension was farmland landscape as the “former field pattern of Wylde Farm”¹ and it still retains this character with individual fields, hedges and boundary trees. The play area is situated in what was the ‘Lower Wild Pightle’ field on the farm. It is grass surfaced and is contained by a chestnut pale fence with two access gates.



Strengths

- The natural surrounding area is lovely and feels like countryside.
- Mature trees around the play area.
- Long views from certain areas.
- Seating, especially in the middle of the play area is great for families, social gatherings etc.
- Plenty of space.
- Many fond memories are tied in with the current play area.
- Wildwooders initiative has generated community support and fundraising opportunities.

Weaknesses

- Entrances and approaches to the play area are worn and very muddy when it's wet. The landing zones around the equipment is also worn and muddy.
- A lot of space but not much to do.
- The equipment is old and currently aimed at younger children.
- The play area does not include equipment for older children.
- The play area is not accessible for all children.
- The equipment does not provide opportunities for Parents/Carers to interact with children.

¹ Hampstead Garden Suburb Character Appraisal, Heath Extension - Area D

Opportunities

- Work in partnership with children, their parents, carers and the wider local community to improve and expand the age range and accessibility of the play area.
- A lot of space within the play area to incorporate natural play features.
- Strengthen the links between the history of the Heath Extension and the play area and using this as a theme to inform the concept design.
- Provide a space that supports the mental and physical health and wellbeing of children.

2. What we'd like – Design Principles

An “inclusive, nicer and well kept playground!”²

Play

- There should be more challenge and excitement for all children and more things to interest older children. There should be enough for continuing interest as children grow up.
- There should be more variety of ways to play and more things to do.
- The play area should be more inclusive and designed for a wider range of abilities and ages.
- There should be opportunities for children of different ages and abilities to play together.
- It should be a sociable space where parents, carers, grandparents, older siblings as well as children can share the space and feel welcome.

Place

- The play area should fit into and enhance the ‘spirit of place’ respecting the history and natural environment of the whole Heath Extension area. It should keep a countryside feel rather than feel like an urban park.
- It should be designed with high quality natural materials e.g. timber play equipment and use natural colours.
- Any improvements should respect the sentimental attachment & memories attached to the play space already.
- A play area should be a beautiful place and encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility to care for the Heath.

3. What else needs to be considered – Constraints

- The project is estimated to cost in the region of £40,000.
- The improvements will need to align with the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy 2018-2028 and the Heath’s Play Principles.
- Equipment and natural features will need to be robust and able to withstand use in a public open space.
- Assess the on-going cost of inspecting and maintaining the new play equipment.
- The finished design will fit with current EN 1176 and EN1177 guidelines.
- A risk benefit process will also be used to assess risk (so we don’t design out excitement!)

² <https://www.wildwooders.uk/post/hidden-gems-around-the-heath>

- The improved play area will need to keep within the footprint of the current play area.
- The upper age limit of the play area will be 12 years old.

4. How we're going to improve the space – Process

1. Form a Stakeholder Steering Group (Wildwooders, City of London Corporation & Landscape Architect, representative of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee).
2. Concept design.
3. Fundraising.
4. Developed design & planning application.
5. Technical design & tender.
6. Works on site by contractor and City of London Corporation.
7. Inspection, handover and re-opening of the play area.