

Appendix 1 – (Draft) Annual Report for Highgate Wood Charity 2021/22

1. Objectives and Activities

The City of London protects and manages, by charitable trust, almost 11,000 acres of open spaces within and around the capital for the benefit of local communities and visitors.

Highgate Wood is a 28-hectare ancient woodland site opened to the public in 1887. Situated in north London between Highgate Village and Muswell Hill, it is bounded by Muswell Hill Road to the East and Transport for London land to the west and the north west. The site was once part of a 1,000-acre hunting estate belonging to the Bishop of London and is one of group of ancient woodland sites in the Highgate and Hornsey area.

Acquisition: Highgate Wood was acquired in 1886 by the City of London Corporation from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners under the provisions of the Highgate and Open Spaces Act 1886.

Administration: Formerly administered by the Corporation's Coal and Corn and Finance Committee 1886-1966, Highgate Wood is now managed by the City of London Corporation through the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee. There is also a Highgate Wood Consultative Group, which comprises Members from local community groups (including the Friends of Queen's Wood), local Ward Councillors and a schools liaison representative.

The purpose of the Highgate Wood Consultative Group is devising and implementing the City Corporation's policies and programmes of work in relation to Highgate Wood and Queen's Park in accordance with the provisions of the Highgate Wood and Kilburn Open Spaces Act 1886.

The purpose of the Charity is:

'the preservation in perpetuity by the City of London Corporation of the open spaces know as Highgate Wood, Highgate and Queen's Park Kilburn for the use by the public for exercise and recreation.'

Explanation of Aims and objectives for the year including the changes or differences it seeks to make through its activities

The activities of the Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Kilburn charity are guided by its Charitable Objective, as stated above, and are developed within the framework of the City Corporation's Corporate Plan 2018-23, the Open Spaces Business Plan 2021-22 and the Highgate Wood Divisional Plan 2021-24.

The contribution which Highgate Wood makes towards supporting the aims and objectives of these is set out in section 2.

2. Highgate Wood Achievements and Performance

Achievement to date (Update April – August 2021) against the key priorities for 2021/22:

- Continue the works for green recovery and restoration of woodland erosion and compaction, linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased visitor numbers.

Heath Hands Volunteer sessions at the Wood have been focused on closing off a number of desire lines within the woodland. The Highgate Wood Team have also used fallen timber to deter use of already compacted areas of woodland.

- The creation of the 2021/22 Conservation Area next to the Play Area will form a major area of recovery after many years of intensive usage. A review of the policy of conservation area creation and the timescales of enclosure will also be carried out.

The Highgate Wood Team have now established the boundary of the new conservation area and stock fencing is being ordered to enclose the area, and works to install the fencing will be undertaken in November. Coppicing will be kept to a minimum, as Staff will carry out work on the tree canopies to increase light levels.

- Increasing operational efficiencies and income generation as a response to budget cuts to be implemented in 2021/22.

Operational efficiencies have been made in relation to the Staffing provision. The Highgate Wood Team will reduce to four full time staff from March 2022, following the retirement of a member of the Highgate Wood Team.

- Deliver the tender for the Pavilion Café.

Due to Officer workload, the tender process for the Pavilion Café has been delayed and will now be undertaken during 2022/23. The Highgate Wood Café remains on a Tenancy-at-Will lease. Officers will carry forward this priority to 2022/23.

- Develop an ecological monitoring methodology to measure visitor pressure on sensitive areas within the woodland and build on the data provided by the oak decline survey which is now in its twelfth year. Progress on this proposal has been delayed due to resource issues and we plan to develop this in 2022/23

- Forest School activity review.

Short Term Licenses for two Forest Schools have been issued. The development of the Licencing scheme has continued to be impacted by the pandemic during 2021/22. Officers will carry forward this priority to 2022/23.

- Increase volunteering including ecological monitoring.

Due to the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on Officer workload works to progress this project will be carried forward to 2022/23.

Other achievements during 2021/22 were:

- The Highgate Wood Team have ensured that the Wood has remained open and accessible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. During the Spring, the Highgate Wood Team have worked to mitigate the impacts of increase visitor numbers by closing off a number of desire line pathways which have increased in size, due to social distancing and visitors attempting to find quieter, less busy areas, within the woodland.
- Pests and Diseases continue to be managed through planned inspections the Highgate Wood Team supported by the Arboricultural Team. In July 2021 sites visits and inspections were carried out for Oak Processionary Moth. A number of nests were found and removed by the Team. No biological spraying took place in 2021.

Performance Measures for 2021/22

- Achieve budgeted income and expenditure targets for Highgate Wood and Queens Park Kilburn Charity. Income from events and café rental is reduced this year. The café tenant is in discussion with the City Corporation regarding the current rental arrangement.

The Highgate Wood Café remains on a Tenancy-at-Will lease. The tendering for the new café lease will be undertaken during 2022/23.

Regular budget monitoring is on-going. A small number of licenced activities have been able to take place within the Wood since July 2021. Licenced activities, events and sports bookings is still below pre-pandemic numbers and this continued to impact on income generation.

- Maintain Green Flag Award and Green Heritage Accreditation for 2021.

Green Flag and Green Heritage judging has taken place. Green Flag results for 2021 will be released on 14 October 2021.