

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Hampstead Heath Consultive Committee	26 September 2022
<b>Subject: Grassland management for nature recovery</b>	<b>Public</b>
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	<b>No</b>
If so, how much?	<b>N/A</b>
What is the source of Funding?	<b>N/A</b>
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director Environment	<b>For Discussion</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Stefania Horne, Assistant Director, Hampstead Heath	

### Summary

The report sets out a series of proposals for future grassland management on Hampstead Heath in response to the City of London's 2020 Climate Action Strategy, nature recovery and the biodiversity emergency.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Members provide feedback on the future grassland management proposals set out in paragraphs 7 - 10 and appendix 1.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. The City of London launched the Climate Action Strategy in October 2020 with a series of milestone objectives to achieve net zero by 2040. At the same time the global pandemic was placing immense pressures on open spaces across the UK and beyond as the public sought respite from lockdowns. In early 2021 works started across the Heath to repair the impact of increased visitor numbers and widespread erosion and compaction on grassland and in woodland areas.
2. With the pandemic moving into a new phase the Trees and Conservation unit propose a series of interventions to build on the nature recovery work carried out over the last 18 months and to commence on a programme of lowland meadow creation by taking areas of amenity grassland out of regular cutting regimes. This will have multiple benefits, notably reducing compaction, increasing biodiversity, reducing flooding, and improving carbon absorption and storage.

## **Current Position**

3. Hampstead Heath extends to 275 hectares in area. The Heath's two largest broad habitat types are woodland and grassland, with woodland covering an estimated 105 hectares, and grassland 117 hectares. These figures come from the 2009 Vegetation Survey, now 13 years old but still relatively accurate. Of the 117 hectares of grassland 33 are currently classified as amenity grassland and remain intensively managed for sports and informal recreation. The remaining 84 hectares are managed as lowland meadow and cut on an annual or longer cycles.
4. The amenity areas demand an intensive management regime of weekly cutting from March through to September to maintain a short sward. Some of the sports pitches are on a more intensive maintenance programme with cricket being the most labour and machinery intensive. With the costs of fuel exceptionally high for the foreseeable future maintaining these sports facilities remains a major commitment financially. This report does not propose any changes to the current level of sports pitch provision as these facilities provide a critical local recreational resource.
5. Returning to the Climate Action Strategy, there are ten linked work streams delivering the key objectives, with Natural Environment (Open Spaces) working towards the Carbon Removals Project. An external consultancy is currently finalising a report which provides detailed data on carbon sequestration and storage values across all the Open Spaces. The report also identifies opportunities for increasing carbon removals through a variety of interventions, including tree planting and vegetation management. One of the interventions identified is conversion of amenity grassland into lowland meadow, a process that involves the cessation of regular mowing in the growing season. These areas are then allowed to naturally regenerate and repopulate with a variety of plant species providing valuable habitat, improving biodiversity, and allowing soil recovery.
6. The meadow creation will have an important additional benefit in terms of flood alleviation where the new meadow areas alongside the Highgate Pond chain will act as buffering zones during heavy rainfall events absorbing excess surface water and reducing inflow into the pond chain.

## **Proposed sites for lowland meadow creation and works in Spring 2023.**

7. The Ecologist and Trees and Conservation Manager have initially identified a maximum extent of 7.2 hectares across the Heath where areas of amenity grassland not designated for sports activities could be allowed to develop into meadow. However due to the current extent of amenity usage of these areas it is initially proposed to allow the development of up to 3.3 hectares of meadow to assess this change in management before any further proposals are developed. Alongside this relaxed mowing regime, it is proposed to further enhance some of these areas with wildflower seeding. An initial area has been identified for the creation of 0.1 hectare of wildflower meadow on Hampstead Heath Extension. It is hoped that this will be a project linked with the conservation charity Butterfly

Conservation. A map setting out the proposed location is available at appendix 1. Table 1 shows the proposed size of these areas.

Table 1: Proposed amenity grassland management areas

Label	Name	Area (m2)	Area (Hectares)	Proposal
10	Extension Changing field	8798	0.88	Relax mowing
12	Extension Cricket fringe	6047	0.60	Relax mowing
13	Extension track fringe	2187	0.22	Relax mowing
14	Old hockey pitch	3070	0.31	Relax mowing
15	Old hockey pitch	1115	0.11	Wildflower meadow
16	Vale- Fairground	4324	0.43	Relax mowing
17	Vale- Ice House grassland	1060	0.11	Relax mowing
18	Small Tumulus field	1762	0.18	Relax mowing
19	Highgate No.1 fringe	3723	0.37	Relax mowing
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>32,086</b>	<b>3.3</b>	

8. The Ecologist and Trees and Conservation Manager intend to implement the proposed grassland management changes in March 2023, and will be liaising with the grass cutting teams this summer to ensure that the selected areas are clearly marked up for the start of the cutting season next spring.
9. Areas with relaxed mowing regimes will then come under the wider cyclical grassland management programme but will for the first couple of years receive an Autumn cut.
10. The Heath Ecologist will be monitoring the areas and recording change. These finds will be reported back to Committee, along with any future proposals resulting from this initial work.

### Corporate & Strategic Implications

11. This contributes towards the achievement of the three aims set out in the City of London Corporate Plan 2018-23: Contribute to a flourishing society, Support a thriving economy and Shape outstanding environments, in particular the following Corporate Plan outcomes:
12.
  - (11) We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment.
  - (12) Our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained.
  - (2) People enjoy good health and wellbeing.
13. The proposals embed the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy 2018-2028 Strategic Outcomes A: The Heath is maintained as a flourishing green space and historic landscape, with the proposals focusing on habitat creation, landscape

character, and balancing visitor impacts with conserving the natural fabric of the Heath and B: Improved quality of life for Heath visitors.

#### Financial Implications

14. A small reduction in fuel usage is expected as a result of the proposals. This will help to offset current increase in fuel prices.

#### Resource Implications

15. No impact.

#### Climate Implications

16. The City of London launched its Climate Action Strategy in October 2020 and the strategy is now in implementation stage. A key part of the strategy is conserving and enhancing biodiversity alongside reducing the City of London's carbon emissions. The proposals included in this report will contribute towards achieving the Climate Action Strategy's objectives of Net zero by 2040. will be the main objective at Hampstead Heath in the short term, especially following the impact of exceptionally high number of visitors due to COVID-19.

#### Legal Implications

17. The objects of the Hampstead Heath charity are the preservation of Hampstead Heath for the recreation and enjoyment of the public. Under section 16 of the Hampstead Heath Act 1871 the City Corporation "...shall at all times preserve, as far as may be, the natural aspect and state of the Heath, and to that end shall protect the turf, gorse, heather, timber and other trees, shrubs, and brushwood thereon." The City Corporation as trustee has other statutory powers to provide recreational facilities, set aside part of the Heath for sports pitches, etc. A balance must therefore be found between preservation and recreation.
18. Where amenity grassland is not required it is entirely consistent with the 1871 Act to manage that land in a way that captures more carbon, in line with the wider City of London Climate Action Strategy, particularly where this will enhance biodiversity. If climate change is not addressed, then this will inevitably have an increasing impact on the natural aspect of the Heath. As a reservoir undertaker it is also appropriate to give consideration to measures which will reduce the risk of overtopping along the Highgate Chain.

#### Risk Implications

19. Risks are monitored and recorded through the Departmental Risk Register. Mitigations, such as fire breaks, will be in place to reduce the risk of fires associated with long grass.

#### Equality Implications

20. A Test of Relevance: Equality Analysis has been undertaken and a full equalities analysis is not proposed/required.

#### Security Implications

21. Security implications are monitored and recorded through the Departmental Risk Register.

## **Conclusion**

22. These proposed amenity grassland changes will be part of a wider programme of Climate Action focused works including tree planting and nature recovery projects to protect the natural fabric and mosaic of habitats that make up the Heath.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Hampstead Heath future grassland management proposal

### **Stefania Horne**

Assistant Director, Environment Department.

T: 020 7332 3322

E: [stefania.horne@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:stefania.horne@cityoflondon.gov.uk)