

HAMPSTEAD HEATH, HIGHGATE WOOD AND QUEEN'S PARK COMMITTEE
Monday, 12 February 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee held at Committee Room 3 - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 12 February 2024 at 4.00 pm

Present

Members:

William Upton KC (Chair)
Alderman Gregory Jones KC (Deputy Chairman)
Deputy John Absalom
John Beyer
Deputy Timothy Butcher
John Foley
Matthew Frith
Jason Groves
Caroline Haines (Ex-Officio Member)
Emily Hills
Michael Hudson
Pauline Lobo
Deputy Charles Edward Lord
Wendy Mead
Councillor Arjun Mittra
Alethea Silk

Officers:

Jonathan Meares	- Environment Department
Bob Roberts	- Environment Department
Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Simon Owen	- Chamberlain's Department
Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
William LoSasso	- Environment Department
Joanne Hill	- Environment Department
Jayne Moore	- Town Clerk's Department
Charlotte William	- Environment Department
Isobel Tucker	- City Surveyor's
Edward Wood	- Comptroller & City Solicitor's

1. APOLOGIES

Alderman Gregory Jones KC chaired the meeting, with William Upton KC observing the meeting remotely.
Apologies were received from Andrew McMurtie.

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

There were no declarations.

3. **MINUTES:**

4. **TO AGREE THE PUBLIC MINUTES AND SUMMARY OF THE HAMPSTEAD HEATH, HIGHGATE WOOD AND QUEEN'S PARK COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 29 NOVEMBER 2023.**

RESOLVED, That the minutes of the meeting of 29 November 2023 be approved as an accurate record of the proceedings.

5. **TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE HAMPSTEAD HEATH CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 15 JANUARY 2024**

The Committee noted the draft minutes of the meeting of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee of 15 January 2024.

RESOLVED, That the Committee endorse these two appointments (as proposed by William Upton KC, seconded by Alderman Gregory Jones KC):

- John Arnoldi as Heath Hands representative; and
- Michelle Martin as Vale of Health Society representative.

6. **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

The Committee noted the report of the Executive Director Environment providing Members with an update on matters relating to Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park since the last Committee meeting of 29 November 2023.

7. **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

The Committee noted the report of the Executive Director Environment providing Members with an update on matters relating to Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park since the last Committee meeting of 29 November 2023.

On the Ponds access project, the meeting heard that the project is not yet complete - the expected return date of the contractors is in late February 2024 with completion expected in late March 2024.

A Member commented that there was merit in further greening upon completion of the project at the mixed pond. The meeting heard that the option of a natural barrier is being explored.

The meeting heard, in response to a question, that the ponds remain open during the works, with a few short closures for materials deliveries.

On Queen's Park, the meeting heard (in response to a Member question) that the sandpit project is expected to be complete by late March 2024.

On the lower threshold of closing Highgate Wood in high wind, a Member asked whether any feedback had been received on that. The meeting heard that no feedback appeared to have been received on Highgate Wood being closed, and no concerns had been expressed.

On the Woodland Walk extension at Queen's Park, a Member asked for further clarification on its timeline. The meeting heard that staff and financial capacity is currently being examined, and no firm timeline is currently available until other projects are completed. A Member asked whether commercial sponsorship options were being explored. The meeting heard that all funding opportunities are being explored.

On the cricket nets at the Heath extension, a Member asked whether there were planning consent issues. The meeting heard that the proposal is for the crickets nets to be relocated which would require planning permission due (in part) to a proposed change in use of some structures and their degree of permanence, which would in turn involve resources. The meeting heard that a more suitable site has been identified a short distance from the current site that is approximately 400 metres from the current site, noting a recent Members' site visit and noting that cricketers have been consulted and are content with the move.

8. **REVIEW OF THE 2023 EVENTS PROGRAMME & PROVISIONAL EVENTS PLANNED FOR THE 2024 PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director, Environment.

A Member commented that there was merit in focussing on facilitating events to generate income, in particular in respect of the filming industry – noting the importance of securing appropriate contracts and pricing. Members noted that a current review at the CoLC is examining how Open Spaces are monetised and marketed effectively and appropriately via, potentially, an expanded film team and/or expanded fundraising functions.

Members asked whether a report could be provided on the matter on the Charities Review and on the exploitation of the CoLC's Open Spaces assets. The meeting noted that a progress update of the Charities Review was expected to be submitted by December 2024 (with the potential for update reports earlier than that), and that the Committee could expect a draft income strategy by October 2024.

Citing the example of paragraph 10 of the report (Affordable Art Fair), a Member commented on an apparent lack of commercial dynamism around commercial events on the Heath, noting that CoLC executives did not appear to be taking professional advice and that the event (and similar events) had the potential to generate better income. The meeting heard that officers will be initiating a review of events and commercial practices, and there is scope for advice being sought from City Surveyors and that a Head of Development and Partnerships is being recruited imminently, noting that lettings policies were being carefully scrutinised - including for the Affordable Art Fair.

A Member commented on the criticality of ensuring that a commercial fee is negotiated in line with appropriate professional advice, and asked that an outturn report be submitted as a non-Public item showing the figures relating to the Affordable Art Fair.

RESOLVED, That Members approve the large and major events proposed as part of the provisional 2024 Events Programme for Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood,

and Queen's Park as set out at Appendix 1, noting that an outturn report would be submitted as a non-Public item setting out the revenue generated by commercial events, including the Affordable Art Fair.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment setting out the risk management procedures in place within the Environment Department and its Natural Environment Division taking into account the requirements of the Corporate Risk Management Framework and the Charities Act 2011.

On the new risk detailed in Appendix 1a ('014 - Impacts of anti-social behaviour on staff and site'), a Member asked why that risk has been added. The meeting heard that concerns had been expressed about some behaviour directed at CoLC colleagues, and that a new reporting mechanism has been set up to ensure consistency. Members expressed concern around anti-social behaviour and how that impacted Heath colleagues.

On the risk 'Decline in condition of assets', Members noted that there was merit in prioritising asset renewal, noting the apparently poor condition of some assets. A Member asked when the operational property review was expected to be concluded, and the meeting heard that condition surveys were expected to be completed by April 2024, and an audit of all built assets is expected to be largely completed by January 2025.

RESOLVED, That Members confirm, on behalf of the City Corporation as Trustee, that the Summary Risk Registers appended to the report satisfactorily identify the key risks to the charities and that an appropriate risk management process is in place.

10. RENEWAL OF PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH HEATH HANDS

The Committee noted the report of the Executive Director, Environment providing Members with an update on officers' actions to renew the partnership agreement with Heath Hands.

Referencing paragraph 7 of the report, the meeting noted (in response to a request) that the annual report of Heath Hands would be submitted to the Committee in addition to the Consultative Committee.

The Committee thanked the volunteers at Heath Hands for their contribution.

11. *HAMPSTEAD HEATH CONSTABULARY UPDATE

The Committee noted the report of the Executive Director, Environment providing Members with an update on the Hampstead Heath Constabulary ("the Constabulary") operations since the previous report of 29 November 2023.

The Committee expressed its support for the Constabulary, noting the importance of consulting Police bodies to ensure correct training for existing and new Constabulary officers, noting also the issues raised in the risk register including the added risk, noting also the reputational risk to the CoLC around potential negative incidents.

The meeting noted that Constabulary uniforms would no longer be provided by the City of London Police.

A Member noted that most of the anti-social behaviour took place in the West Heath area, commenting that a new broad-based body could be set up to deal with those issues, and that data on anti-social behaviour in particular should be reported to the Committee.

In response to a question on CCTV coverage on the Heath, the meeting heard that CCTV coverage was limited.

The meeting noted (in response to questions) that the budget to increase the complement of constables from 4 to 6 has been approved, and that costs related to the digital platform (section 16) are currently being explored.

The Committee noted that the meeting dates referenced on pages 1 and 2 of the report should in fact read '29 November 2023'.

The Committee noted that progress would be reported to the next Committee, and that an annual review is to be reinstated (to be revised in the event of a deterioration in anti-social behaviour).

12. *** OPERATIONAL FINANCE PROGRESS REPORT (PERIOD 9 APRIL - DECEMBER) 2023/24 - HAMPSTEAD HEATH, HIGHGATE WOOD AND QUEEN'S PARK**

The Committee noted the report of The Chamberlain providing an update on the operational finance position as at period 9 (April – December) 2023/24 for the Committee's local risk revenue budget to date and projected year-end outturn position, current live capital projects and outstanding debt position together with additional information on the various reserve funds held and other relevant finance information for the divisions of service and Charities which fall within the remit of the Committee. It was noted that the report was inadvertently included in the agenda pack twice.

A Member asked for clarification on any impact of sports charges not being increased. The meeting heard that appendix 1 set out the current income position in relation to Hampstead Heath.

Referencing sections 20 – 23 of the report, a Member commented on outstanding debt arrears and sought clarification on the robustness of the enforcement.

A Member asked why fees were not paid upfront. The meeting heard that the debts were historic and that non-payers are excluded from future use.

The Committee noted the assurances that public and CoLC money and debt is taken seriously.

The Committee noted that emails on the matter of outstanding debts had already been exchanged on the matter providing responses to the queries raised in relation to outstanding debt arrears, that further details of the matter would be dealt with outside the confines of the Committee, and that any further concerns would be raised at a future Committee meeting.

A Member commented (referencing sections 25 and 27) that the CIL money would be expected to have been directed towards a restricted income fund, and that was confirmed.

The Committee agreed to extend the meeting beyond two hours.

13. *** CURRENT STRUCTURE OF NORTH LONDON OPEN SPACES**

The Committee noted the report of the Executive Director, Environment that provided Members with an update on the current structure of North London Open Spaces following the implementation of the Corporation's Target Operating Model.

14. ***DRAFT HIGH-LEVEL BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25 – ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT**

The Committee received the report of the Interim Executive Director, Environment presenting the Environment Department’s draft high-level Business Plan 2024/25 for the Natural Environment Division and City Gardens.

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

Members noted the revised meeting dates that had been circulated.

The meeting noted that the late Declan Gallagher, former operations manager at Hampstead Heath, is expected to be commemorated on 30 April 2024. The meeting heard that a plaque and bench are under consideration and that locations are being explored.

The Committee unanimously agreed that the waiting list for benches be bypassed (if necessary) in order for a bench to be dedicated to Declan Gallagher.

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

A Member commented that there appeared to be a tendency for reports to delay progress, and the Committee noted the need for an interim strategy (including on income generation) while finalised strategies were formulated.

18. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED, That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for subsequent items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

The meeting ended at 6.30 pm

Chairman

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