

Committee(s) Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee	Dated 21 May 2024
Subject: Assistant Director's Report: Hampstead Heath	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's "Corporate Plan (2024-2029)" does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Diverse engage communities Leading sustainable environment Vibrant thriving destination Providing excellent services Flourishing public spaces
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Bob Roberts Interim Executive Director, Environment	For Information
Report Author: Bill LoSasso Assistant Director (Superintendent) North London Open Spaces	

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Hampstead Heath since the last Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee meeting on 12 February 2024.

Given the unique structure of this Committee, and following discussion with the Chairman, North London Open Spaces officer reports will resume the past practice of being split between the two charities for which this committee is responsible - Hampstead Heath charity and Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Kilburn charity – where possible.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.

Main Report

Parliament Hill, sports, and leisure

1. All the required works have been completed to maintain our TrackMark certification at the athletics track, and many clubs, schools, colleges and universities are now booking its use. An official opening was held on Wednesday 17 April 2024 with the Lord Mayor in attendance. Members of this committee, Members of Hampstead Heath Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Management Committee, the project team, project board, and stakeholders involved in the refurbishment of the track, along with relevant partners, attended. Highgate Harriers hosted a QuadKids event, with a ceremonial lap of the track completed. Speeches occurred and a plaque was unveiled to mark the occasion.
2. Meetings have been held with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and the tennis coaches at Parliament Hill and Golders Hill Park to review licences to ensure the City Corporation is achieving appropriate income while ensuring that tennis provision remains accessible. Tennis bookings remain with ClubSpark, which are now increasing with better weather and longer days.
3. The cricket square has received its first season cut, and conditioning has started in preparation for the start of the cricket season on 23 April. Bookings are underway, with a number of regular clubs returning at Parliament Hill Fields. The markings on the non-turf cricket pitches at Heath Extension will be carried out in the coming weeks in preparation for the season. Meetings are being held with the City Surveyors who hold the budget for the refurbishment of the cricket nets on the Heath Extension. Their allocated budget is quite limited and is time-bound, but it can be used to either refurbish the existing cricket nets or to relocate them. Planning permission and additional funds would be needed to relocate the nets, so work is underway to liaise with the local cricket clubs and ECB to look at funding opportunities and to explore all the options so the cricket nets can be used in a timely manner.
4. The bowling green and croquet lawn received its first conditioning cut. The height is being reduced to a playing height of 5mm for the start of season, which is on the second Saturday in April. The 2024 season runs from 13 April to 29 September 2024. The bowling green was included in the 'New Parks for London Manual' as a good example of quality of management.

5. Football matches are being held and the rugby pitches are back in use with full fixtures with Hampstead Rugby Football Club on Heath Extension. Bookings are also increasing for the football pitches, rounders and grids with schools and the general public.
6. The Lido and ponds continue to be busy with winter swimming becoming more popular, especially with more awareness and publicity being generated about the health benefits, showing a year-on-year rise. Christmas Day celebrations and New Year's Day swimming across the ponds and Lido continued to be popular with swimmers and their families. In January, the Lido hosted the Parliament Hill Ice Swimming Hootenanny (PHISH) with participants travelling from across the country to compete in a number of innovative races. The Lido also hosted Crisis' Annual Ice Breaker Challenge to raise funds to combat homelessness.
7. A Wi-Fi connection is being installed at the Mixed Pond and new cables are being installed at the Men's Pond to strengthen the Wi-Fi connection, which will help with payment made by credit cards.
8. The procurement of a new leisure management system has now been completed and we are finalising the contract with the successful supplier. This exciting development will provide a more user friendly, affordable and flexible ticketing and booking system for our swimmers. The new system also promises improved data collecting and reporting functions, enabling data-driven decision making. We believe the system has great potential for services beyond swimming. We are on schedule to build and test the new system over the next 6 - 12 months in preparation for full implementation for the 2025 summer season.

Golders Hill Park

9. Late winter maintenance is being carried out in the gardens, with formative rose pruning and the cutting back of herbaceous, perennial spent flower heads. This year has also been a particularly good year for *Anemone nemorosa* (wood anemone) with large swaths flowering throughout the park. Grass-cutting has also started when the weather conditions allow. A *Pinus sylvestris* (Scots pine) grown from seed in 2009 has been planted in the Pinetum to replace a fir tree that failed during a December 2023 storm. Horticultural apprentices and the gardening team provided table decorations for the Natural Environment Board's dinner in January, which was held in the Livery Hall, Guildhall. The team created winter-inspired decorations using Hampstead Heath oak discs as a base and foliage and vegetation from the gardens.

10. Structural repair work has taken place on the Pergola, and five of the worst columns have been pinned at the base with two 450mm steel pins. The columns do still show significant 'wobble' and are therefore deemed to be 'slightly unstable' or 'unstable'. It has been recommended that the eastern part of the colonnade remains fenced off for safety reasons. Timberwork on top of the columns is being replaced as recommended by the structural engineer in the hope that this will stabilise the structure. Senior Building Surveyors are working with specialist contractors on the next phase of works, with the aspiration to stabilise the unsafe columns and enable the Pergola to fully reopen to the public. Surveyors will know if the timber installations were successful in achieving stabilisation once the work has been completed. A significant amount of funding is needed, however, for a complete restoration of the Pergola. A separate report on the Pergola has been submitted by the City Surveyor's Department
11. Heath Hands' volunteer sessions are continuing in both Golders Hill Park and the Hill Garden, with three sessions a week being hosted by the gardening team. This averages an additional 50 hours per week of value-added and much appreciated maintenance work carried out by volunteers.
12. The sandpit area is still closed due to refurbishment works taking place, as the sleepers to retain the sand are being replaced. Progress has been made and the work is going well, but it is not yet known when the sandpit will be reopened.

Golders Hill Park Zoo

13. The vacant Zookeeper position has been filled internally, so recruitment is underway to back-fill the Assistant Zookeeper position. As a result of the staff changes, the launch of the experiences has been put on hold until we have a full complement of staff to be able to deliver them. Trial sessions are still underway to gain valuable feedback before the experiences are available. We hope the experiences will go live and be bookable in the summer. Six new light fallow deer were welcomed from ZSL Whipsnade Zoo on 9 February 2024, to join the existing herd of red and fallow deer.
14. The Zoo's Facebook, Instagram and X accounts are all live, with posts that highlight the animals, staff and work carried out. Social media has been invaluable, not only to increase the number of followers, but also to promote the Zoo and, as aforementioned, to showcase the hard work of the keepers. The new Zoo branding has been a real asset and the redesign of all the interpretation boards for the species held is currently being finalised.

Ponds Access Project

15. All the works and snagging list have now been completed at the Ladies and Mixed Pond. The hoists are now installed, and the grating has been added. Additional funding was gained to install a new fence and to purchase a security shed to house the new hoist at the Mixed Pond. The path leading to the Mixed Pond has been renovated. All the temporary mats have been removed and the ground has been levelled to enable better access to the Mixed Pond, which will be opened on Saturday 4 May. Planting and additional works, such as seeding, laying additional slabs and railings, has been carried out by the in-house teams and Heath Hands to ensure it is safe, accessible and welcoming for when the Pond opens for the summer season. There have also been additional maintenance works carried out at Kenwood Ladies' Pond in preparation for the summer season. The works associated with this Project were all completed at the end of April 2024. A new gate has also been installed at the Men's Pond to ensure access is not permitted out of hours, helping to prevent any anti-social behaviour and ensure the ponds are kept safe and secure when there are no lifeguards on site. The only remaining works is the manufacturing and finishing of the new sliding door, which will be installed at the Men's Pond. The contractors, Ash, will be installing the sliding doors by mid-May and all outstanding works will be completed by the end of May. Training was given to the Lifeguards at the end of March on how to use the new hoists. A 'Project on a Page' is attached as Appendix 1.

Conservation

16. There has been a general focus on works at the ponds since January. The Conservation Team has been carrying out reinstatement work on the Heath Extension following the recent de-silting of Number Seven Pond on the Seven Sisters chain. At the Mixed Pond, the team has been planting wildflowers as part of the ecological improvement work. As part of the regular management of the reservoir-category ponds on both the Highgate and Hampstead chains, the team carried out mowing and scrub management at several sites for cyclical surveying of the dams, and additional vegetation management in preparation for the six-monthly reservoir inspections this month. Pond levels across the Heath are unusually high currently, but this will be advantageous if we have a dry spring and hot weather later this summer.

Ecology

17. Further work has been undertaken by the Ecologist and Head of Conservation to select a contractor to install new aeration equipment at the Ladies' Pond, Men's Pond, and Hampstead Number 2 Pond. We are planning to have new diffuser systems installed by June 2024. The Ecologist has been leading on

this year's amphibian survey, covering all 30 ponds across the Heath, assisted by the Conservation Team and Heath Hands volunteers. Cameras have been installed in the lead up to another hedgehog survey. A new survey was carried out to identify the larval eggs of the brown hairstreak butterfly, which have been found for the first time on the Heath. In addition, the Ecologist has been identifying potential sites for new leaky dams on the Fleet Stream as part of the Climate Action Strategy objectives to improve resilience and reduce flood risk.

Arboriculture

18. The Tree Team visited Burnham Beeches in February 2024, carrying out specialist conservation work on some of the most fragile old beech pollards, which is an excellent opportunity to exchange knowledge and skills with colleagues and provide training for our new apprentice. The team has also been working around the Ladies' Pond enclosure while it is closed for building repairs. Plans are underway to further develop the nature-based programme of oak processionary moth management for this coming year, working with Forest Research.

Fees and charges (FY'2024-25)

19. Officers shared the proposed fees and charges for financial year 2024-25 (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025) with the Hampstead Heath Sports & Wellbeing Forum at its meeting of 28 February 2024, and with the Consultative Committee in mid-March via email, as unfortunately the next planned meeting of the Consultative Committee did not occur until after the new financial year was due to begin. As noted in the email consultation, the majority of fees and charges were increased in line with RPI inflation (5%), except for limited exceptions which were noted.

West Heath

20. There has been a marked increase in sexual activity detritus in West Heath in the past year, increasing more in recent months. This has also been accompanied by an increase in drug paraphernalia being found, specifically hypodermic needles, which staff have been documenting where possible. Officers are developing a plan to appropriately address activity in the area, informed by past approaches that have been successful.

Events

21. The Affordable Art Fair will proceed in May 2024, with the build having begun on 23 April.
22. The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Fairs arrived on 26 March for the traditional Easter Holidays, finishing on Sunday 7 April.
23. The 'Night of the 10K Personal Bests' will be held on Saturday 18 May 2024, which is a qualifying event for athletes ahead of the Olympics held in Paris this summer. With up to 28 nations being represented, it's a very important part of the 2024 athletics season, with national and international stars competing. We are delighted the track has been fully refurbished and we're able to host this important and free event.
24. Hampstead Heath hosted the London International Cross Country on 20 January 2024, with top UK athletes in the field. It was the first large event of the 2024 athletics calendar and was a qualifying event for the World Cross Country Championships on 30 March in Belgrade. It was live streamed on the internet and the event was well attended despite the poor weather.

Constabulary

25. Research and preparation continue on creating a new induction and training programme for the Constabulary. The Superintendent and Acting Sergeant are consulting with colleagues on content and curricula, and are researching potential training providers. A training and induction handbook will also be created as an output of this process that will be used as an induction tool and continuous training resource.
26. As the Constabulary is still understaffed, Parkguard will continue to provide additional support until the unit is back to full staffing, at which time we will consider engaging with Parkguard in times of heavy use on an as-needed basis.

Heath Hands agreement

27. Significant progress has been made on the updated agreement with Heath Hands. The Superintendent and a working group of Heath Hands trustees continue to meet to finalise the necessary documents. Once completed, the agreement will last for five years and build upon the existing strong relationship between the City Corporation and Heath Hands and facilitate continued participation of thousands of community members in caring for Hampstead Heath.

Hampstead Heath Management Strategy

28. As previously reported, a small working group will be formed to participate in the planned five-year review of the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy. Six members of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee have expressed interest and will participate. Once participation from the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee is confirmed and a consultant has been retained, an initial meeting will be scheduled.

FY2024-25 Management activities

29. A separate report entitled "Management Priorities for FY'2024-25 (Business Plan)" has been submitted with the papers for this Committee.

Financial implications

30. No implications.

Resource implications

31. No implications.

Climate implications

32. Included within the annual plan for 2024-35 are a series of projects which contribute towards achieving the City of London's Climate Action Strategy, which was launched in October 2020. A key part of the strategy is conserving and enhancing biodiversity alongside reducing carbon emissions.

Legal implications

33. No implications.

Risk implications

34. Risks are monitored and recorded through the Departmental Risk Register.

Equality implications

35. No impact.

Security implications

36. Security implications are monitored and recorded through the Departmental Risk register.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Ponds Access Project 'Project on a Page'

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