

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

### Summary

This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Highgate Wood and Queen's Park 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. This report for Highgate Wood & Queen's Park charity is split into two sections: Part 1: Highgate Wood, and Part 2: Queen's Park.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.

## **Main Report**

### **PART 1: HIGHGATE WOOD**

#### **Volunteers and conservation work**

1. Since the Highgate Wood Consultative Group meeting on 13 November and up until 20 March, the Highgate Wood Team have held thirteen Heath Hands sessions, led by the Highgate Wood Senior Ranger. The volunteer sessions have focused on reinforcing dead hedging around two of the conservation areas and the bluebell areas, using material from holly clearance around path-side trees needing regular safety monitoring. Within the conservation areas, living hedges were also maintained by cutting and laying live shrub species. Self-seeding saplings of oak, hornbeam, and birch were dug out of the meadow and planted into the recent 2022/23 conservation area, which is benefiting from just being enclosed. There are noticeably more fungi and more herb layer species establishing, giving ground-foraging birds like chaffinch and redwing valuable refuge habitat.
2. Other conservation work has included recording wildlife sightings, highlights being a woodcock seen briefly in a conservation area, a pair of buzzards seen regularly, and a hedgehog seen foraging in a keeper's garden. Heath Hands recently supplied us with four hedgehog boxes which have gone out into the gardens of the keepers' lodges in the Wood. The Senior Ranger helped organise and carry out the annual bat hibernation surveys of the disused railway tunnels adjacent to the wood, with our highest count of 39 bats in January. The annual bird survey of the wood was completed on 14 February. We are very grateful to Michael Hammerson for arranging several moth surveys since last November.

#### **Highgate Wood events**

3. We hosted the 'Winter Guided Walk' event in late November, which was well attended. We had already had our tree and fungi and Autumn guided walks in early November, and they were both well attended by a diverse group of people. The Senior Ranger set up the guided walk diary for spring and liaised with the Communications Officer to connect with social media. The first two walks are 'Bird Song Walks' that the Senior Ranger led at the end of March. The Highgate Wood team has been providing photos and information for our social media feeds.
4. All the licensed events and activities are proceeding well, but the very wet weather has been a challenge. The forest schools, 'Into the Woods' Nursery,

and Wild Learning groups rotate certain areas to minimise impact where possible on the surrounding ground and area.

### **Tree management**

5. The Highgate Wood team have trimmed and felled dead and decaying trees in high-use areas, including birch, hornbeam and oak. They have also carried out some dead wooding using the Mobile Elevating Platform (MEWP). The tree team have helped with other works: bringing an uprooted oak to ground and removing a large dead hanger, as well as a few other more recent jobs, including helping to cut back the overgrowth around the Lodge garden.
6. There have been two full-day and three half-day closures since the introduction in November 2023 of the lower 37mph closure for Highgate Wood during high-wind events, which was instituted after careful analysis and in furthering of ensuring public health and safety in this woodland.

### **Team and recruitment to vacant posts**

7. The remaining one Ranger and two Operative Ranger positions are being posted imminently. Upon successful appointments, the Highgate Wood team will be staffed at capacity.

### **Sports field and play area**

8. The football season is soon ending. It has been quite a challenge to keep the pitch playable this season; we have had seven weekends to date cancelled due to a waterlogged field. This has been the case across the borough on all grass sports fields. The cricket season started on the weekend of 27 April, and hopefully the weather will improve for us to prepare the cricket square and the teams will have a good, even bounce. The same four teams are scheduled to play again, which helps with consistency, with the bonus of Metro Blind Cricket Club returning, which draws in a lot of support from the locals and anyone passing through.
9. The large sandpit has been reconstructed by a contractor as the surrounding timbers were falling apart. The team have replaced all the old sand with new. We are waiting for some quotes for major works for our uneven rubberized safety surfaces around certain small pieces of equipment and the large middle area.

## **Solar panels**

10. The solar panels included back in 2013 on the roof of the tractor shed have been inspected and rewired. A number of the cables had to be replaced due to probable squirrel damage. The panels were also cleaned, which will help with the estimated 6,000 kw/hr average output.

## **'Firing London's Imagination' project update**

11. We have continued to work with Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln (FoHRK) to progress their National Lottery-funded 'Firing London's Imagination' project, with the aim of conserving, displaying and interpreting the Roman kiln, which was discovered in 1968. Since the last meeting, the kiln has been removed from Bruce Castle Museum by a specialist conservator and is being assessed for current condition and future restoration priorities. Plans for the refurbishment of the Information Hut, where the kiln will be re-displayed, have progressed through structural surveys and architects' initial proposals for consultation, which will be displayed at the meeting along with an outline project plan as requested.
12. Between September 2023 and March 2024, 714 school aged students have been engaged with the project through taught sessions delivered in Highgate Wood and their school setting. Teacher feedback has been very positive in terms of knowledge and skills gained, as well as positive outcomes related to social skills, outdoor learning and awareness of local heritage. A Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics with Art (STEAM) programme of work for has been developed for Key Stage 4/5 and is in the process of being piloted with at least one school.
13. We are also supporting FoHRK, heritage professionals and local potters to build a working replica kiln within Highgate Wood, which will be fired at the Community Day planned for early September.

## **Cafe tendering**

14. Officers have initiated conversations with colleagues in the City Surveyor's Department regarding tendering for the cafes across North London Open Spaces, including Highgate Wood. An initial conversation has only occurred so far, and we are now creating an indicative timeline and process for the effort. A separate paper will be submitted at the next meeting of this committee.

**Fees and charges: FY'2024-25 (1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025)**

20. As noted within the Committee Agenda Pack, fees and charges were updated under the urgency procedure given that the next committee schedule did not occur until after the 2024-25 financial year had begun. The majority of fees and charges were increased in line with RPI inflation (5%), except for limited exceptions, which were noted. Officers consulted with the Highgate Wood Consultative Committee in mid-March via email, as unfortunately the next planned meeting of the Consultative Group did not occur until after the new financial year was due to begin. Only one minor comment was received.

**New Highgate Wood Management Plan (2024 – 2029)**

15. Officers will be preparing a new 5-year management plan for Highgate Wood this financial year (1 April – 31 March), as the current plan is due to expire. In addition, new management plans are being written for Queen's Park and West Ham Park, and the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy will undergo its planned mid-point review. A brief is being prepared for consultants to submit proposals to complete all documents, with work expected to begin in May or June. Officers will report back to this committee at its next meeting.

**FY2024-25 Management activities**

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

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**PART 2: QUEEN'S PARK**

**Staff Recruitment**

1. Recruitment for the remaining Ranger position at Queen's Park will begin imminently, and upon appointment will take the Queen's Park team to capacity.

**Projects**

2. Completion of the Sandpit Project has unfortunately been delayed due to a number of unforeseen and unavoidable issues that arose during the project. Regular site progress meetings have been held with the City Corporation, the Landscape Designers, Blakedown Landscapes, and representatives from QPARA to discuss and address issues, and to ensure any changes identified on site were then reflected in the designs and drawings. The only outstanding work is the assessment of the play equipment and sandpit area by the Principal Designer to ensure compliance with CDM requirements, the wet pour rubber and any landscaping works after the contractors have demobilised. We will then arrange for a ROSPA inspection to be carried out and, if the sandpit area is satisfactory, it can hopefully be opened on the same day. We hope the works and the Sandpit Project will be completed by mid-May.
3. There are plans to refurbish the toilets at Queen's Park, following a delay as funding was required at the start of the project to carry out investigations and repairs to the collapsed drainage system. All the external works have been completed. The City Surveyors have requested funding to carry out internal works, which will include full internal decorations such as new cubicles, new walls and new flooring. Once the funding is secured, timescales for completion will be better known.

### **Paddling Pool**

4. A meeting was held with our Senior Swimming Manager to look at the design of the paddling pool and the water treatment/pump house facility following closure in 2023. It was decided to appoint Quality Leisure Management Limited, who had the technical expertise to undertake an independent review of the operation of the paddling pool. The review assessed pool and water treatment, design, operations under relevant health and safety in swimming pools guidance, supervision and trained staff, access, and security. The report highlighted the areas of concern. Pool readings and independent bacteriological tests highlighted that the readings were outside of acceptable parameters. Given the paddling pool is only open for a few months of the year, these readings indicate that current controls are inadequate. Meetings are now being held with City Surveyor's Department to identify all of the works that were recommended in the report, the costs, and to discuss and decide the next steps. The paddling pool cannot safely reopen this summer before all the work has been addressed, unfortunately, and it will also need to be supervised by suitably trained staff.

### **Green Flag Award, Green Heritage Accreditation and London in Bloom Award**

5. Queen's Park has entered into the Green Flag Award, Green Heritage Award and London in Bloom accreditation awards this year. A 1-year management plan was written and submitted with the Green Flag Award application to ensure the entry could be received, as the previous management plan for the park had expired. An updated management plan is being written as noted herein. Green Flag judging will take place on 22 May. The London in Bloom dates will be announced soon.

### **General Park Updates**

6. Trees works around the perimeter of the park were undertaken by an external contractor. This included works carried out on a Norway maple, several London planes and a horse chestnut.
7. Timberplay were at Queen's Park on Monday 22 April, installing the new toddler's swing following ground preparation work carried out by the grounds team. Timberplay also carried out essential remedial work to the adventure playground. The children's adventure playground has had several uplifts, which were completed during the winter period. The pagoda has been renovated and repainted, and the seats and flooring have now been painted in fire-retardant paint following recent arson damage. New picnic benches have also been placed in the playground.
8. Turfing work has been carried out to the raised bund area next to the paddling pool, which was tired and worn.
9. The sculpture named 'Noah' previously located next to the field of hope is by Michel Manzoni, a French wood carver, has unfortunately failed due to rot.
10. The sensory garden adjacent to the café has recently been renovated. The old bed and hederia wall climber have been removed, and the planters previously outside the café have been reused and replanted with sensory plants, such as thyme, lavender, and rosemary. New trellis panels have been installed and jasmine wall climbers have been planted. Repairs were also made to the paving. Further works are planned to relieve the compaction around the magnolia tree. A small fence will be installed around the bed along with further planting.
11. Whips donated by Butterfly Conversation have been planted on one of the south bunds, which will support butterfly and moth species as well as provide valuable food sources for birds. This area has been fenced off temporarily until the whips have successfully rooted and established.

12. A new goat shed was purchased in February. The farm is also being tidied up and new turf is being laid to make it more inviting and appealing to visitors.
13. The Head of Operations and Parks has met with the Lawn Tennis Association twice in furtherance of developing and maximising tennis participation across North London Open Spaces, and to ensure income is generated through coaching agreements and court bookings. We also seek to ensure the facilities are accessible for the communities within which they are situated.
14. Work is underway to formalise the tennis coaching agreements so that there is consistency across all of the North London Open Spaces, including Queen's Park. Meetings have been held with the tennis coaches, in furtherance of creating new licences for the tennis coaches until April 2025.

### **Cafe tendering**

15. Officers have initiated conversations with colleagues in the City Surveyor's Department regarding tendering for the cafes across North London Open Spaces, including Queen's Park. An initial conversation has only occurred so far, and we are now creating an indicative timeline for the process.

### **Park Events 2024**

16. Events taking place in the park this year include Kilburn State of Mind Festival on 1 June, Shakespeare in the Squares (All's Well That Ends Well) on 15 June, Queen's Park Book Festival on 31 August and 1 September, and Queen's Park Day on 15 September.
17. There is an Open Gardens event on 16 June. The Senior Ranger has been in contact with the allotment coordinators, and they will ensure the allotment is tidied up by 16 June to be part of this wider London event.
18. Richard Pinnars Entertainment has confirmed that they can do eight children's entertainment shows again this year, and details are now being finalised.

### **Fees and charges (FY'2024-25)**

21. As noted within the Committee Agenda Pack, fees and charges were updated under the urgency procedure given that the next committee schedule did not occur until after the 2024-25 financial year had begun. The majority of fees and charges were increased in line with RPI inflation (5%), except for limited exceptions, which were noted. Officers consulted with the Queen's Park Consultative Group in mid-March via email, as unfortunately the next planned meeting of the Consultative Group did not occur until after the new financial year was due to begin. No comments were received.



### **New Queen's Park Management Plan (2024 – 2029)**

19. Officers will be preparing a new management plan for Queen's Park this financial year (1 April – 31 March), as the current plan is due to expire. In addition, new management plans are being written for Highgate Wood and West Ham Park, and the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy will undergo its planned mid-point review. A brief is being prepared for consultants to submit proposals to complete all documents, with work expected to begin in May or June. Officers will report back to this committee at its next meeting.

### **FY2024-25 Management activities**

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

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### **Financial implications**

No implications.

### **Resource implications**

1. No implications.

### **Climate implications**

2. 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**

3. No implications.

### **Risk implications**

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

## **Equality implications**

5. No impact.

## **Security implications**

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

## **Appendices**

### **Report author**

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