

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee	Dated: 14 January 2024
Subject: Assistant Director's Report	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes 	-Diverse engaged 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?	£0
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of:	Katie Stewart, Executive Director, Environment Department
Report author:	Bill LoSasso, Superintendent, North London Open Spaces

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Hampstead Heath since the last Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee meeting on 16 September 2024.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Parliament Hill / Leisure

1. Parliament Hill Fields and Golders Hill Park remain popular with visitors throughout the autumn months. The main tasks are hedge cutting, tidying borders, leaf clearance from paths, playgrounds and facilities to maintain clear, safe access, and other grounds maintenance operations. Drains, gullies and grids are also being regularly checked and cleared in anticipation of the upcoming wet weather.
2. Parliament Hill Athletics track continues to be well used by many clubs, schools, colleges and universities for athletic meetings, sports days and training. Regular Tuesday and Thursday evenings continue to be well attended by the Highgate Harriers, Hampstead Rugby Club and Mornington Chasers for training nights. There have been 2283 users of the track in organised sport in the last 3 months, which demonstrates the use and popularity of the track since the refurbishment was completed in December 2023.
3. The Highgate Harriers held a mid-week open meeting and a 5K track race was trialled in August, which proved to be very popular. The feedback was positive, so plans are underway to host the same event again in 2025, aimed at the local community.
4. On 21 September, Hampstead Rugby Club held a new event named 'Trytopia'. The aim was for it to be similar to the 'Give it a Go' event, for visitors of the Heath and the local community to trial rugby. The event was advertised in the local press, on social media and on-site banners. It was a fun-based activity day to promote the club, increase membership and promote the benefits of exercise and keeping fit. It was a successful event, attendance was good and discussions are underway whether to run the event again in 2025.
5. In October, Camden Schools Cross-Country had 1200 runners from across the borough participate in races throughout the day and, in November, the London Youth Games returned to the Heath. Approximately 1700 young athletes from 32 boroughs came to the Heath. The races were across four age groups, which included under 11s, under 13s, under 15s and under 17s, with individual, team and over medals being awarded. The event promotes young athletes from varying backgrounds, many of whom continue to compete on the world stage. Previous entrants have included gold medalist Sir Mo Farah, Paris Olympics

bronze medalist Georgia Bell and Paris Olympics double bronze medalist Samuel Reardon.

6. The tennis courts at Parliament Hill and at Golders Hill Park continue to be well used and busy throughout the year, with evenings and weekends booked during the autumn and winter months. Moss cleaning has been completed on two of the tennis courts at Golders Hill Park. Regular meetings continue to be held with the LTA and the tennis coaches at Parliament Hill and Golders Hill Park to ensure the City is maximising potential income and tennis provision is accessible to everyone.
7. The cricket season ended after the first weekend in September and play will resume again in May 2025. End-of-season preparations were carried out on the cricket squares at Parliament Hill and the Heath Extension in the autumn. Many of the regular cricket clubs have already provisionally booked for next year.
8. A contractor was appointed to refurbish one single lane of the cricket nets on the Heath Extension, and work began on 25 November 2024. The work will take one week to complete, subject to weather and ground conditions, and includes removing the old cricket net structure and taking the old facilities to landfill and installing a new modern structure. The work will be completed early December.
9. The bowls and croquet season ended on 30 September. End-of-season renovations took place at the end of September/beginning of October and the bowling green was aerated, scarified, overseeded and top-dressed to begin preparations for next season.
10. The football pitches at Parliament Hill Fields continue to be popular and used by clubs, the public and groups for football training and general fitness. Works were carried out at the end of August to set out the four football pitches and three rugby pitches on the Heath Extension in preparation for the start of the season. All the lines have been marked out to create the pitches for the season ahead, which commenced from September onwards. The season is now underway, and the pitches are in full use with multiple fixtures on both days across a weekend. Rugby re-commenced on the Heath Extension from the 16 November, following the report that the changing rooms could be opened.
11. The changing rooms on the Heath Extension were further disinfected and resampling of Legionnaires was carried out, which confirmed it had been eliminated, so they are now open and being used by rugby and football teams.

Additional bypass valves have been fitted so all the water running into the changing rooms is now fed by the mains, bypassing the header tanks, which is aiding the flushing system. Weekly flushing takes place to prevent any build-up of contamination. Installation of an automatic flushing/dosing system is being considered to ensure weekly flushing takes place, out of season.

12. The Lido and three bathing ponds were busy throughout the summer, with August being the busiest month. The income and bather numbers were higher than the same period in August 2023, despite the poor weather. The winter season has started well at the Lido. This is coupled with the sauna opening on 30 September, which has to be closed to allow for repairs, which are forthcoming. The income and bather numbers for the Lido and bathing ponds are similar to last year's figures. The Winter Swimming Club began at the Mixed Pond on 30 October. The Pond remains closed for lifeguarded public swimming now until April 2025.
13. Planned maintenance work will be taking place at the Lido in early 2025, which will include a new electrical intake distribution board, repairs to the outer wall, repairs to the terraces and refurbishment of the filters. There are also plans to increase the number of solar panels on the Lido roof in the New Year.
14. Phase 2 of the planned maintenance project at the Ladies' Pond is scheduled to start in February/March 2025. Refurbishment works include a hot water boiler, showers and changing areas and essential repairs will be carried out. The Ladies' Pond will be closed for the duration of the work and women-only swimming will be moved across to the Mixed Pond during this period.
15. There was a duathlon on 1 September, which was a huge success. It involved 400 competitors who swam in the Lido and three bathing ponds and ran in between all the swimming facilities. The Lido will host a British Red Cross charity event in December 2024 and Crisis Icebreaker event in January 2025. The traditional Christmas Day Lifebuoy's Races will take place at the Men's Pond and will commence at 11am.
16. All the works at the Ladies', Mixed and Men's Ponds, as part of the Ponds Access Project, have been completed. The extra grating to fill the void in the Men's Pond has now been completed, and the final snagging and sign off is imminent. Funding has been successfully gained to install roller shutters to protect the windows of the observation huts at the Mixed and Men's Ponds.

17. The procurement of a new Leisure Management System has now been completed and the contract with XN Leisure has been signed. A new Fixed Term Contract Project Manager position is currently being advertised. The successful candidate will be responsible for leading and coordinating a project team and building and maintaining effective relationships with the vendor, to build, install, develop, test and monitor a bespoke Leisure Management System for the swimming facilities on the Heath. The work will ensure the existing booking systems are maintained and remain operational until the new system is live, which we hope will be in preparation for the 2025 summer season. This new Leisure Management System will provide a more user-friendly, affordable and flexible ticketing and booking system for swimmers. The new system also promises excellent data collecting and reporting functions enabling data-driven decision-making.

Golders Hill Park

18. The recently appointed Ranger has settled in well and is a welcome addition to the team. The Head Gardener position for Golders Hill Park and the Hill Garden and Pergola was advertised until the end of November. Shortlisting has taken place, and interviews have been scheduled for mid-December. A vacant Operative Ranger position will also be advertised in December until early January 2025, with shortlisting and interviews to be scheduled for January 2025.

19. A lot of identified works have been scheduled in the Cyclical Work Programme and will be completed in the autumn/winter months. This includes repairs to the pathways, resurfacing many of the tarmac paths throughout the park and refurbishment of the toilets. Drainage works were carried out in the summer to address the very wet areas and poor drainage in the middle of the park. Minor re-seeding of the drain line was undertaken in the autumn.

20. The sandpit area remains closed to the public. Due to the machinery required and technical complexity to renovate this area and meet play safety standards, external contractors will be appointed to complete the work. A specification was put together and several contractors have been invited to tender for the work. A NCIL funding application to Barnet Council will be submitted and it will include completion of the sandpit area, renovation of the adjoining playground and improving accessibility. The Heath Extension playground, which was completed in January 2024, continues to be very well used by the local communities. Regular playground inspections are carried out by all the staff across the Heath to ensure the equipment is safe to access and use.

21. Structural repair and timber strengthening works continue to take place and are being planned on the Pergola, with regular surveys being carried out. 11 separate emergency works have been identified. It is hoped these remedial, safety works will commence before Christmas. Some of the works are complicated by weather restriction such as the lime mortar works or material availability such as the Portland stone, but the works will take approximately 16 weeks. Some sections will need to be closed locally whilst the remedial works are carried out and the public diverted elsewhere.
22. Heath Hands volunteer sessions are continuing in both the Park and Hill Garden, with three sessions a week being hosted by the Gardening Team.

Golders Hill Park Zoo

23. The animal adoption page on the website has been updated and is now live. Members of the public will now be able to adopt all the species housed at Golders Hill Park Zoo. Adopters will receive a photo of their chosen species and a certificate, and they will also receive the new Zoo newsletter, which will be emailed out to individuals every quarter. Increased publicity is underway for the Zoo both externally and through the Zoo's social media channels.
24. During October and November, the Zoo team have been working with the team at Battersea Park Children's Zoo (BPCZ) on a keeper exchange. BPCZ hosted three of our keepers and in return, Golders Hill Park Zoo team hosted three of their keepers to share knowledge, skills and experience. It worked well and provided a great learning and networking opportunity for everyone involved. The staff at both Zoos benefited from the keeper exchange and gained a lot from visiting another Zoo, so it has been decided to make it an annual occurrence to provide the team with continuing professional development.
25. The Zoo has a new newsletter, which is sent out quarterly to all the supporters. The first issue went out in October and the second newsletter will be sent out in January 2025. The newsletter provides information about the Zoo Team and the species held at Golders Hill Park Zoo and gives subscribers the opportunity to find out what goes on behind the scenes.
26. At the beginning of August, the Zoo underwent its first BIAZA (British & Irish Association of Zoos & Aquariums) accreditation screening. This is a new process, which will enable members to become accredited members. The

outcome of the accreditation screening will be known towards the end of the year and shared with Zoo staff. Work is now underway with the Learning team to incorporate the Zoo and develop learning opportunities with schools, which is a key component of the BIAZA accreditation screening.

Update on Flood Mitigation and Resilience for Hampstead Heath

27. The Head of Conservation and the Senior Ecologist of the Heath, supported by City of London's Environmental Resilience Team, continue to work with the London Borough of Camden's Climate Adaptation and Resilience Team, to reduce surface water flooding on East Heath Road and the Parliament Hill residential area. An update on these proposals and the works being funded by the City of London Corporation's Climate Action Strategy are included with the Assistant Director's Report. We plan to include the new proposed leaky dams, which slow down water flow, and ponds in the first Hampstead Heath's Consultative Committee's Walk of the New Year, on 11 January 2025.

Ecological activities

28. In October, yearly bat box checks were completed by the Highgate Wood Team with the assistance of the Tree Team. Thirteen bats were recorded in the boxes with a mixture of common and soprano pipistrelles, although there was evidence of bat activity in another three (droppings). 27 bat boxes are currently monitored across Hampstead Heath.

29. The Ecology Team recently co-authored a published scientific paper related to the introduction of chemicals into Heath ponds through dog swimming. A separate committee paper details the background and findings of this research.

30. The rare Dartford warbler has been recorded by Hampstead Heath birders frequenting the thistle and scrub patches near Parliament Hill for over a week. This is the first record of this bird for 30 years and highlights the importance of maintaining and managing these habitats on Hampstead Heath.

31. Sightings of brown hairstreak butterfly eggs in Hampstead Heath's blackthorn patches continue to increase thanks to the dedication of a member of the public. This species was first recorded on the Heath in 2024 and it is hoped it is becoming established.

Model Boating Pond Wildlife Sanctuary

32. In 2016, an 'island' (connected by a section of land) was created in the Model Boating Pond to protect a group of established trees. It was closed to the public whilst planting took place and wildflower meadows were established. As a result, the area has become an important reserve for various species of birds which have made this their home.
33. The Model Boating Pond 'island' has since been designated a sanctuary, with no public access. Moorhens and great crested grebes have built nests on the edge of the island, and a shy snipe was found using the new planting area as a refuge, showing the value of keeping this area as a dedicated place for wildlife.
34. To ensure the Model Boating Pond Island remains a sanctuary for wildlife, offers initiated fundraiser to remove the connecting section of land to create a 'true island', establish further wetland planting where the connecting section of land has been removed, create wildlife homes on the island, including amphibian and reptile hibernaculum, install temporary fencing to protect the new planting, monitor the flora and fauna which are using the island, and create a flourishing green space for a mosaic of natural habitats.
35. The £50,000 needed to initiate the project has now been raised, thanks to generous support from committed public donors. Officers currently expect to be able to appoint a contractor to carry out works in late February 2025, prepare the site in March, begin work in April, and complete the project in May, subject to unforeseeable impacts to the timeline.

Conservation Team

36. The Conservation Team carried out coppicing and other vegetation management on the dams and spillways on both the Highgate and Hampstead chains of ponds. The Team has also been carrying out bramble and scrub management across the Heath at several locations, including the Heath Extension and South Meadow. This work needs to be done out of the bird nesting season to avoid disturbance to nesting birds. Alongside this, the cutting operation has to be done in stages to avoid harm to hedgehogs who are going into hibernation. Other important conservation work has been completed along the Seven Sister's Ponds on the Hampstead Heath Extension, and Sandy Ride on Sandy Heath using Heath Hands volunteers.
37. The Conservation Team assisted at recent cross-country events on the Heath, laying woodchip across tarmac sections for the runners' safety and then collecting this following the events.

38. The Conservation Team has supervised Heath Hands sessions held in the eastern and western section of the Bird Sanctuary, where they were clearing scrub and bramble and willow saplings in the open meadow areas. There were additional Heath Hands volunteer sessions on the Heath Extension, focusing on meadow restoration, involving sapling removal and bramble clearance.

North London Open Spaces Tree Team

39. The Tree Team met with the City Corporation's Carbon Removals Team in November to discuss options for supporting tree soil health by funding fencing and a soil geo-injector unit to alleviate compaction and enhance soil microbial communities around veteran trees and also other established trees growing in heavily compacted soil. The Team have continued their work installing additional enclosures around veteran trees on Hampstead Heath and have now protected 18 trees to date, with more planned between 2025 to 2027 funded by the Climate Action Strategy budget.

40. The Team featured on the ITV news on 26 November, carrying out halo pruning around the two veteran trees at Two Tree Hill on Sandy Heath.

41. We have had several major storm events since September, the most recent and serious being Storm Burt, which moved across the UK on 23 and 24 November. Ten trees across the Heath were damaged, most of these were on Sunday 24 November. The majority of these were root plate failures. The Met Office issued an amber warning very late for Sunday 24 November and forecasted local gusts of up to 53mph, but the local privately owned weather station at Gospel Oak recorded a maximum gust speed of 44.9mph. The Tree Team and other staff assisted with making fallen and damaged trees safe on 25 November and clearing any blocked paths. The Tree Team have also been carrying out priority tree works generated from their cyclical tree inspections at various locations around the Heath during October.

Financial implications

45. No implications.

Resource implications

46. No implications.

Legal implications

47. No implications.

Risk implications

48. Risks are monitored and recorded through the various risk registers, including the Division and Departmental Risk Registers.

Equalities implications

49. No implications.

Climate implications

50. Included within the business plan for 2024-25 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.

Security implications

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

Conclusion

52. This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Hampstead Heath since the last Hampstead Heath Consultative Meeting on 16 September 2024.

Appendices

N/A

Bill LoSasso

Assistant Director (Superintendent)

North London Open Spaces

bill.losasso@cityoflondon.gov.uk

