

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	Dated: 4 February 2025
Subject: Assistant Director's Report (Hampstead Heath)	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 Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee meeting on 22 October 2024. Please note that while a meeting of this committee occurred on 3 December 2024, it was a continuation of the 3 September meeting, and so no Assistant Director Report was produced.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Report format

1. At the meeting of 22 October 2024, Members expressed their desire for future reporting to be aligned with the charitable goals of each respective charity / open space under its remit.
2. In response, and aligned with Committee direction, Officers have adapted the Assistant Director's Report to align with the four Themes and ten Priorities of the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy. Additional matters will be covered in an "Additional Relevant Matters" section as needed.

We protect and conserve the Heath.

Priority 1: A mosaic of natural habitats is maintained and flourishes

3. We have had several major storm events this autumn and winter that have required the closure of our gated open spaces, including Golders Hill Park and the Hill Garden and Pergola. The most recent and serious storm was Storm Burt on 23 and 24 November. Ten trees across the Heath were damaged, with the majority being root plate failures. 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.
4. On the 6, 7 and 8 December, Storm Darragh hit the United Kingdom, causing widespread disruption across the country including London. Wind speeds were predicted to be in excess of 50mph, verified by the Gospel Oak weather station. Three trees were damaged on the Heath, with all three trees suffering root plate or stem failures.
5. All the sites are checked after high winds and storms to check the health and condition of trees, to report any dangerous trees that need remedial work and to remove any overhanging branches.

6. Golders Hill Park and the Hill Garden and Pergola have closed nine times (seven of which being all day) since October 2024 due to high winds of over 40mph for safety reasons. During high winds and whilst the park is closed to visitors, the staff carry out a range of tasks such as site patrols, cleaning tools, machinery and equipment, cleaning staff areas as well as administration and office work. When the winds ease, patrols are carried out to check the park for signs of damage and tree failure.

Closure incidents since committee meeting on 22 October 2024

Date	Event	Wind speed prediction (gust)	Wind speed actual (gust)	Length of time closed
1 January 2025	Floris	53 mph	44.9 mph	GHP closed all day
31 December	Floris	45 mph	34.6 mph	GHP closed afternoon
22 December	Eowyn	46 mph	29.2 mph	GHP closed all day
18 December		43 mph	49.5 mph	GHP closed all day
8 December	Darragh	51 mph	49.5 mph	GHP closed all day
7 December	Darragh	57 mph	49.5 mph	GHP closed all day
6 December	Darragh	N/A		GHP closed morning
24 November	Bert	50 mph	44.9 mph	GHP closed all day
23 November	Bert	50 mph	41.5 mph	GHP closed all day

7. Officers 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 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 Consultative Committee's walk of the New Year, on 11 January 2025.

8. 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.
9. Main winter tasks include hedge cutting, tidying shrubs and borders and leaf clearance from paths, playgrounds and facilities. The leaf litter and hedge cuttings at Parliament Hill Fields have been added to the headlines around the cricket enclosure to improve the habitat for hedgehogs who are overwintering in this area.
10. The Senior Ecologist recently co-authored a published scientific paper related to the introduction of chemicals into Heath ponds through dog swimming. A separate committee paper for this meeting details the background and findings of this research.
11. In October, yearly bat box checks were completed. 27 bat boxes are currently monitored across Hampstead Heath.
12. The rare Dartford warbler has been recorded by Hampstead Heath birders frequenting the thistle and scrub patches near Parliament Hill in November last year. This is the first record of this bird for 30 years and highlights the importance of managing these grassland and scrub habitats on Hampstead Heath. Although the Dartford warbler's numbers have recovered, the species remains on the amber list having been reduced to just a handful of breeding pairs in the 1960s. It is hoped that the species may return to breed on the Heath later this year.
13. 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.
14. Planting carried out by Heath Hands at the Mixed Pond and Men's Pond following the Ponds Access Project has been successfully established. The areas cleared by the construction work were improved by planting native species and replacing lost vegetation. The planting ensured natural barriers were

installed for security reasons and new habitats and wildlife corridors were created.

We protect and conserve the Heath.

Priority 2: Heritage aspects and landscape character are maintained

15. Structural repair and timber strengthening works continue to take place on the Pergola, with regular surveys being carried out. 11 separate emergency works have been identified. Some of the works are complicated by weather restrictions such as the lime mortar works or material availability such as the Portland stone, but the works will begin in December and take approximately 16 weeks. Some sections may need to be closed locally whilst the remedial works are carried out and the public diverted elsewhere. Tilt monitors and crack gauges were installed on 12 and 13 December to monitor movement within the stone and brickwork and were live almost immediately. They record positional data every 15 minutes.
16. Contractors have recently removed defective timbers from the wooden structure of the Pergola and erected supporting timber to the domes and temporary timber bracing to secure the safety of the structure. The columns at the top of the wheelchair ramp access path have been encased. Rectifying works to the Belvedere roof will be carried out in the New Year.
17. Significant and urgent electrical work is scheduled to take place from 3 February to 14 February at Parliament Hill Lido (Grade 2 listed building) and will include replacing the electrical supply for the whole building, including the Education Centre and Lido Cafe, repairs to the outer wall, repairs to the terraces, refurbishment of the filters and installation of additional PVs to increase the number of solar panels on the Lido roof to improve energy efficiency. Some of the works are subject to gaining Listed Building Consent from the London Borough of Camden. These works will result in all electricity to the Lido being shut off during this time, meaning a closure of the facility to the public. A temporary electrical supply will operate the CCTV and intruder and fire alarms, but unfortunately that is not possible to keep the remainder of the facility open. Officers will communicate this closure well in advance, and swimming tickets will be honoured at the ponds during this period. The works will be actively managed by the City Surveyor's Department during the closure to ensure that they are completed as quickly as is possible.

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Priority 3: A balance is maintained between visitor activities and the conservation of natural, built and heritage values

18. 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.
19. Operational staff were on duty over the holiday period including Christmas Day, St Stephen's Day, New Year's Eve and into the early hours of New Year's Day to ensure a clean, safe and accessible Heath was maintained for visitors.

The Heath enriches our lives.

Priority 4: Improved physical health, mental health and emotional well-being.

20. 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.
21. Works were carried out at the end of August to set out and mark the four football pitches and three rugby pitches on the Heath Extension in preparation for the start of the season from September onwards. The season is underway, and the pitches are in full use with multiple fixtures on both days across a weekend. Only a few fixtures have been cancelled due to inclement weather conditions and high winds. Rugby re-commenced on the Heath Extension from the 16 November, following the report that the changing rooms could be opened.
22. 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.
23. The contractor dismantled, removed and replaced the dilapidated cricket net structure on the Heath Extension. The work began on 25 November and was completed on 05 December. A new one-lane cricket net structure has now been installed in the same location. The flooring carpet was left to cure and bond and there is some snagging of ground maintenance tasks to be done, and these are being carried out by the Golders Hill Park team in the New Year. The facility will

then be open for members of the public to use. The new structure complies with the latest ECB's rules and regulations for cricket standards.

24. 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 11's, under 13's, under 15's and under 17's, 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.
25. A duathlon held on 1 September attracted 400 competitors who swam in the Lido and three bathing ponds and ran in between all the swimming facilities. The Lido hosted a British Red Cross charity event in December 2024 and Crisis Icebreaker event in January 2025. The traditional Christmas Day Lifebuoy's Races took place at the Men's Pond with the Lifebuoys Club providing refreshments for the competitors. The race was preceded by 4 hours of mixed swimming, allowing women to join the men for a Christmas Day dip. Many bystanders attended and watched the race from around the edge of the pond and adjacent causeways.
26. Cold water swimming continues to thrive with increasing numbers visiting the Bathing Ponds and Lido during the winter months. The Winter Swimming Club began at the Mixed Pond on 30 October. The Pond remains closed for lifeguarded public swimming now until April 2025.
27. The sauna has been very successful again this year. However, its popularity has resulted in several maintenance issues, which resulted in having to temporarily close it in November 2024 whilst contractors were sourced to carry out the repairs. The repair works are underway, and the sauna will reopen on Saturday 11 January.
28. Phase 2 of the planned maintenance project at the Ladies' Pond is scheduled to start in March 2025. Refurbishment works include a new hot water boiler, repairs to the showers and changing room areas and other essential repairs will be carried out including pathways and fencing. The work will require the Ladies' Pond to be closed for 4 weeks and arrangements have been made for women-only swimming to be moved across to the Mixed Pond during this period.

29. Repairs to the Men's Pond jetty are scheduled for Spring 2025. The work will include repointing, replacing slabs, new wooden handrails, reinforcing the concrete slabs and reinstallation of the much-loved and popular diving board.
30. The Heath Extension changing rooms were further disinfected and resampling of Legionnaires was carried out, which confirmed it had been made safe. Additional bypass valves were 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.

The Heath is inclusive and welcoming.

Priority 5: Increasing social inclusion

31. On 21 September, Hampstead Rugby Club held a new event named 'Trytopia'. The aim was for visitors 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 and well-attended event.
32. The Heath Extension playground, which was completed in January 2024, continues to be very well used by everyone within the local community. Annual ROSPA inspections were carried out in December and regular playground inspections are carried out by staff across the Heath to ensure the playgrounds and equipment are safe to access and use by everyone.

The Heath is inclusive and welcoming.

Priority 6: Diversity and equality

33. An NCIL funding application to the London Borough of Barnet was submitted in December for match-funding to restore, redevelop and improve the sandpit area and adjoining playground at Golders Hill Park. If successful, the project will improve accessibility and increase the play value for children of all abilities, as it will include installation of DDA compliant pathways and wheelchair accessible swings and play tables, and completion of the sandpit area and new play equipment.

34. Staff attended an “Ambitious about Autism” training course at Tree House School in Highgate, which is a National Centre for Autism Education. The training programme focused on open space management to ensure the City Corporation is providing welcoming, safe and enjoyable sites for autistic people and their families to visit.

Together we care for the Heath

Priority 7: Increased sense of collective ownership and personal responsibility

35. 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.
36. Heath Hands volunteer sessions continue to be held in Golders Hill Park and the Hill Garden and Pergola, offering members of the community the opportunity to get together and take part in manual grounds maintenance tasks that keep the sites looking beautiful and cared for. This also provides an increased sense of collective ownership.
37. The Zoo’s 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 and on the Zoo’s social media channels. The Zoo also has a new newsletter, which is sent out quarterly to all the supporters.

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Priority 8: Visitor behaviour is pro-environmental

38. Officers reconvened the Communications Working Group to discuss behaviours on the Heath that are deleterious to the environment (e.g., littering, dog waste, open fires) and develop messaging to communicate seasonally as appropriate to encourage more pro-environmental behaviours.

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Priority 9: People treat the Heath and other visitors with respect

39. Rangers, Constabulary and Parkguard continue to patrol the Heath to ensure visitors adhere to the byelaws and respect the Heath as well as each other, and to assist with any visitor enquiries or matters. The Constabulary have been engaged in an education and engagement effort to educate commercial dogwalkers of the licensing scheme and ensure compliance.
40. Now that a full training and induction programme has been developed for the Constabulary, and following the retirement of the Constabulary Sergeant, Officers will be recruiting for a permanent Constabulary Sergeant and filling the Constable vacancies that have been created with recent departures from the Constabulary team.

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Priority 10: Responsible Management

41. 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. It has been decided to make it an annual occurrence to provide the team with continuing professional development.
42. 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 Zoo has recently received the outcome of its screening to become an accredited member of BIAZA. The current result is pass-pending, as the Zoo has been given time to complete highlighted actions. Upon completion and evidence being provided to BIAZA the pass pending result will be changed, and the Zoo will be fully accredited. Work is now underway with the Learning team to increase the educational offer in Golders Hill Park, creating new zoo-based sessions and develop learning opportunities with schools, which is a key component of the BIAZA accreditation screening.
43. The procurement of a new Leisure Management System has now been completed and the contract with XN Leisure has been signed. 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. 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.

44. Approximately 80 staff attended a conflict management training course in November.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

45. The Hampstead Heath Management Strategy outlines the strategic direction of the charity. The activities noted herein further the achievement of the strategic outcomes noted therein. The activities noted herein also further the relevant strategic outcomes of the City Corporation Plan (2024-2029) and Natural Environment Strategies (2024 - 2029).

Financial implications

46. No implications.

Resource implications

47. No implications.

Legal implications

48. No implications.

Risk implications

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

Equalities implications

50. No implications.

Climate implications

51. 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.

Security implications

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

Conclusion

53. This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Hampstead Heath since the last Hampstead Heath Consultative Meeting on 22 April 2024.

Appendices: None

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