

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 (Highgate Wood)	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 Highgate Wood 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 of the Highgate Wood Management Plan. Additional matters will be covered in an "Additional Relevant Matters" section as needed.

Sustainable woodland management and climate resilience

3. Recent work has revolved around addressing tree damage caused by the succession of extreme weather events that occurred in November and December. Highgate Wood suffered three recorded tree failures during Storm Bert on 23 and 24 November and then another four recorded failures during Storm Darragh on 6 to 8 December. Highgate Wood was closed to the public during both these extreme weather events due to predicted wind gust speeds of 50mph and over. The high winds were also accompanied by heavy rain, increasing the risk of root plate failure due to wet soil conditions which posed a risk to the public. The table below provided wind speed and closure information from the 20 October through to the 1 January 2025.
4. The Wood has been partially or fully closed 10 times (seven of which being all-day closures) since October 2024 due to high winds of over 37mph for safety reasons. During high winds whilst the Wood 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		53 mph	44.9 mph	All day
31 December		45 mph	34.6 mph	Closed afternoon
22 December	Eowyn	46 mph	29.2 mph	All day
18 December		43 mph	49.5 mph	All day

8 December	Darragh	51 mph	49.5 mph	All day
7 December	Darragh	57 mph	49.5 mph	All day
6 December	Darragh	N/A		Closed morning
24 November	Bert	50 mph	44.9 mph	All day
23 November	Bert	50 mph	41.5 mph	All day
20 October		41 mph	31 mph	Closed morning

Culture & heritage

5. The proposals for the Information Centre developed by the appointed architects (for a reconfigured / larger footprint structure) are being costed by City Surveyor term contractor and we hope to have at least an initial, if not detailed, estimate cost for this in the next week or so. Money from Highgate Wood's local risk budget from 2023/24 is being held over to carry our essential roof repairs to the Highgate Wood Information Centre before the end of this financial year. This will supplement the £55,000 that has been allocated from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF grant) to carry out the reconfiguration of the building to allow the kiln to be properly displayed. The Friends of Highgate Wood Roman Kiln (FOHRK) are preparing an updated report for the HLF to draw down more funding for the next stage of the project.

Facilities and access

6. The Highgate Wood management team have now appointed contractors to carry out the extensive repairs to the timber-edging structures around the play area safety surface, and the safety surface where subsurface erosion has caused the subsidence of the rubberised material. These works will start in January and need to be completed by the end of the financial year in March 2025.

Community & education

7. Heath Hands volunteers have continued their activities clearing vegetation along the Muswell Hill Road fence line to assist the tree inspection process and control ivy growth.
8. Members of the Highgate Wood team were joined by other team colleagues from the Leisure, Swimming, Parliament Hill and Formal Parks sections to attend the Autism Education Trust's 'Good Autism Practice in Schools' course at the TreeTop School in Woodside Avenue on 13 December. This was an introductory course to understanding the needs of autistic children and young people and identifying ways to better engage and support this community.

Other Relevant Matters

9. Two new Operative Rangers are settling in well and are already tackling various conservation tasks including a new section of laid hedge on the field edge, which will prove to be a useful skill for future enclosure work when the next conservation area is created in 2027/28. The last staffing vacancy will be filled in early 2025.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

10. The Highgate Wood Management Plan 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

11. No implications.

Resource implications

12. No implications.

Legal implications

13. No implications.

Risk implications

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

Equalities implications

15. No implications.

Climate implications

16. 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

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

Conclusion

18. 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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