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| Committee(s): Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee | Dated: 29 April 2025 20 May 2025 |
| 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 meeting of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee on 14 January 2025 and last meeting of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee on 4 February 2025.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Report format

1. The Assistant Director's Report aligns with the four strategic themes and ten priorities of the Hampstead Heath Management Strategy. Additional matters of interest and importance 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

2. Further to Officers' report on dog swimming and pesticides, signage has now been installed at the dog swimming areas with QR codes directing dog owners to information that will help them reduce the use of these chemicals and mitigate the contamination of the Heath's water courses.
3. The Natural Environment Division has commissioned an external consultant to evaluate the potential of biodiversity net gain (BNG) off-setting at Natural Environment sites. In England, BNG is mandatory under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021), and ensures the development projects result in an overall improvement to biodiversity, either on-site at the development site or off-site. This would create potential opportunities for sites to engage with developers completing projects elsewhere and enter into agreements where biodiversity enhancement projects funded by the developers would gain equivalent BNG credits, enabling the developers to satisfy planning requirements set out in the Environment Act 2021. The consultant visited Hampstead Heath mid-February, and they identified areas on the Hampstead Heath Extension where there may be potential for the creation of wildflower meadows, but these need to be given careful consideration before any decisions can be made. Epping Forest – which has 750 hectares of buffer lands, much of which is agricultural land - has the greatest potential for BNG agreements.
4. The Model Boating Pond project to remove the causeway and create an authentic island is now underway. Site visits by potential contractors have taken place and we are awaiting quotations. As a precautionary measure, we are also

submitting a planning application as there was some controversy over the usage and purpose of the island at the design stage in 2014 and a petition eventually resulted in the decision to designate the island as a refuge for wildlife. If the planning application is approved, works will involve removing the causeway and repurposing the removed soil to create over 100m² of new reed beds on the Pond's eastern bank. We are working towards completing the works in summer 2025.

5. The City Corporation's Climate Action Strategy is now in its fifth year, and there are several significant resilience works planned on the Heath between now and the end of March 2027. Over £120,000 has been allocated to Hampstead Heath including the creation of 10 new small ponds, and clusters of natural construction leaky dams. Leaky dams are small barriers that help create small pools and retain water in areas longer which helps wetland plants, such as brooklime, and invertebrates, to flourish. They help to enhance wetland habitat by slowing down water through the creation of small, natural, woody barriers, and also helps to reduce erosion and improves the diversity of habitat on the Heath. New reed beds are planned on the Highgate chain of ponds, and at Golders Hill Park.
6. A series of training workshops for managing wildfires has been facilitated by the Climate Action's Resilience Team and a number of Conservation Rangers and Heath Rangers will be taking part in the training sessions later this month. The training covers both the practical and safety aspects of managing fires, but also the drafting of fire management plans, alongside the deployment of firefighting equipment. Although we have not experienced any protracted hot dry spells and drought conditions in the last few years in London, we anticipate hotter drier conditions as part of climate change and higher risk of wildfires, especially in periods of high visitor numbers, and this training ensures that offices remain equipped to manage the Heath.
7. The Conservation Team has carried out cyclical coppicing and vegetation management at various locations, including the Old Orchard next to Kenwood Nursery Yard, the banks around the Viaduct Pond, along the Seven Sister's Pond on the Heath Extension, the eastern side of the Bird Sanctuary, and the gorse patches at Sandy Heath. The Team has also focused on managing bramble spread at Pryor's Field, South Meadow, the Ladies' Pond and the Bellmore slopes at the Vale of Health. Bramble has spread significantly since the pandemic. Although it provides excellent habitat for a wide range of species, including nesting birds, it was starting to establish in important grassland areas at multiple locations, and last autumn saw a concerted effort to cut back the last few years' growth.
8. The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) are producing a report this spring which analyses all the Hampstead Heath hedgehog data collected since 2018. They

will use this information to calculate population density and trends. This report will also enable us to understand whether the hedgehog population on the Heath and surrounding gardens and open space is stable, increasing or decreasing. Further surveys are planned this year at Highgate Wood and surrounding gardens. The project also involves community engagement, which will include Heath Hands volunteers and a survey of local areas close to Hampstead Heath.

9. Winter tasks have been carried out, which includes hedge cutting before the start of bird-nesting season, clearing gullies, ditches, grids and outlets to prevent flooding and to assist with drainage of the Heath in preparation for the first cuts on amenity, fine turf and sports areas.

We protect and conserve the Heath

Priority 2: Heritage aspects and landscape character are maintained

10. The Conservation Manager walked the English National Cross-Country course after the event to assess the ground damage. Due to the very wet conditions, there is surface ground damage, but we are confident that this will recover as it always does, with the worst areas fenced off to allow recovery. The Team will carry out chain harrowing to regulate the soil surface when the ground conditions are drier.
11. Structural repair and timber strengthening works continue to take place on the Pergola, with weekly surveys being carried out. Eleven tilt monitors and crack gauges were installed on 12 and 13 December 2024 and were live almost immediately. They record positional data every 15 minutes and are regularly used to monitor the structure. There has been a history of structural movement on the site, and whilst movement has been less severe, secondary steel installation, crack repair and reinforcement have been regular occurrences, particularly around the rotunda. 11 separate emergency works were identified at the Pergola, and these remedial, safety works commenced before Christmas. Some works are complicated by weather restrictions, but the works are progressing well. The Belvedere roof repairs have been completed. Contractors are currently erecting bracing timbers for the red brick section of the Pergola, and this section will be closed locally whilst the remedial works are carried out to ensure the work is not disrupted and visitors are safely diverted elsewhere. Contractors are also working on the bridge and replacing loose balustrade bottles. Graffiti removal and re-painting works to the Pergola are scheduled to commence soon. New shrubs and plants will be planted in the spring to

complement the existing planting, to enhance the landscape value and ensure the heritage and landscape character of the structure is maintained.

12. Officers are collaborating with colleagues in the Natural Environment Heritage Team and City Surveyor's Department to submit an expression of interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for funding to enable the Pergola's restoration.

We protect and conserve the Heath

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

13. The City Corporation's Climate Action Strategy is funding small scale natural flood management (NFM) in the form of leaky dams while restoring existing ponds and creating a number of new small ponds across the Heath. These leaky dams and ponds have been mapped by the Carbon Removals Team, who are supporting the Heath's Ecologist and the Conservation Team to construct these structures between now and the end of March 2027. Works will be starting on the Hampstead Heath Extension later this month. The Heath Ecologist is engaging with London Borough of Barnet's Resilience Team to identify whether 'Ordinary Watercourse Consents' are required for installing leaky dams along the mainstream that flows through the site. There are five clusters of leaky dams planned for the Heath Extension.
14. Small-scale works are also planned in the East Heath area to help address water flows on the Heath, which will also reduce surface water flow during heavy rain onto the East Heath Road that can result in localised flooding outside the Hampstead Heath overground station. Surface water will be deflected off pathways onto grass areas, where the water will infiltrate and dissipate. Officers are also looking at the area to the north of the locking gate at Parliament Hill, and similar measures will be employed to deflect surface water into grassland to reduce flooding on and off the Heath. This work will start this summer and has been part of a consultation process between Camden Resilience Team and residents.
15. As previously noted, the Head of Conservation and the Tree Team are reviewing the site closure thresholds that are used during windstorms. Please see Appendix 1, showing tables on wind speed closure events at Hampstead Heath. Officers have carried out benchmarking with other City Corporation sites and the Royal Parks, analysed tree failure data across NLOS, and are consulting with the corporate health and safety and insurance teams. Officers plan to submit a report with proposals at the next committee.

16. Climate Action Strategy funds have been made available to the Tree Team which will enable them to now monitor and address serious soil compaction issues at Hampstead Heath, which continues to threaten the health of many trees. This work is long overdue and mirrors a wider national issue of soil health and soil impoverishment, with a direct link to plant health and habitat degradation. The funds will cover soil sampling and the purchase of specialist decompaction equipment that will be shared between Epping Forest and Hampstead Heath. The Tree Team is continuing their programme of protecting veteran trees around Hampstead Heath; the most recent works have focused on the line of veteran oak trees that run alongside the southern side of the Zoo enclosures. This location has suffered from long-term compaction, and it is hoped that the rope and post enclosures will allow the rooting zones of the old oaks to gradually recover.

17. At Golders Hill Park Zoo, new interpretation boards have been designed and delivered, which will educate and inform visitors about the Zoo and the species it holds. The interpretation boards will be installed on each of the enclosures.

The Heath enriches our lives

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

18. We continue to regulate forest school activity on Hampstead Heath with the collaboration of the Learning Team. Work continues to license a small number of forest school groups and increase the use of the Old Orchard Garden at Kenwood Nursery Yard to reduce the pressure on woodland sites on the Heath. New licences for 2025 are being issued, and at least one of the three forest schools will be using the Old Orchard Garden.

19. The football and rugby season is underway, and the pitches are in full use and games are being played on the Heath Extension when conditions allow. It has been a very wet season, so the pitches are extremely soft and muddy.

20. London Heathside Athletics Cross-Country event was held on the Heath Extension on Saturday 18 January 2025, which was very well attended and very popular. Hereward House School Cross-Country also held an event on the Extension on Friday 7 March 2025, with over 200 runners attending from local schools.

21. The National Cross-Country Championships was held at Parliament Hill Fields on Saturday 22 February. It was a great success, with over 6,000 competitors from

juniors to adult runners, with the men's adult race having over 1500 entrants. The Ranger Teams from Parliament Hill and East Heath joined forces to set up, steward, and break down the event. Competitors and spectators from all over the country attended and enjoyed the day. Work was carried out after the event to ensure the Heath will recover quickly.

22. Parliament Hill Athletics Track continues to be well used by many clubs, schools, colleges and universities for athletic meetings, sports days and training sessions, and is very popular since its refurbishment. Bookings are underway for the 2025 athletics season.
23. A grant was awarded from England Athletics to help purchase a new hammer net at the Parliament Hill Athletics Track, which will be purchased in March along with new starting blocks and some new competition hurdles.
24. Phase two of the Ladies' Pond maintenance project started on 24 February 2025 and will take six weeks. The planned completion date is April 2025. The Ladies' Pond has relocated operations to the Mixed Pond for this duration. The work includes refurbishment of the indoor showers and changing space, refurbishment of the staff accommodation, improving the boiler and hot water systems, resurfacing the lower rescue deck, refurbishing the outdoor shower and resurfacing the approach path and lower meadow steps. As part of this project, the Mixed Pond has had temporary showers installed in the changing rooms and the staff kitchen area has been refurbished.
25. Drainage channels have been installed at the entrance to the Mixed Pond to prevent rainwater running into the facility. Further drainage and levelling of the approach path is scheduled for April.
26. The Men's Pond main jetty is being refurbished. A new concrete base has been laid at the end of the jetty and the diving board recured in place. Handrails around the edge have been replaced and the concrete slabs re-laid and pointed. During this work, the accessible steps attached to the new accessible changing space are being used. This enables swimmers to access the bathing pond safely whilst works are ongoing.
27. Funding was secured to install new roller shutters on the lifeguards' observation huts at the Men's and Mixed Ponds. The shutters will safeguard and protect the windows and provide better security for the huts from out-of-hours activity and

any anti-social behaviour. This work is scheduled to start before the peak summer season.

28. Successful events have been held at the Lido and Ponds. In December the Lido hosted a British Red Cross charity swim and in January 2025, a Crisis Icebreaker charity swim. Both events were well attended. The Men's Pond hosted the traditional Christmas Day Lifebuoys race, which was also very well attended.

The Heath is inclusive and welcoming

Priority 5: Increasing social inclusion

29. The Zoo offers work experience placements to students throughout the year, and they have received numerous requests for this spring and summer and are now fully booked. Their first student joined the Team on 24 March 2025.
30. The Zoo Team took part in interviews to help celebrate National Apprenticeship Week, which took place from 10 - 16 February 2025. It highlighted the benefits of apprenticeships and the work of apprentices and other employees at Golders Hill Park Zoo.
31. Meetings have been arranged with Capital Kids Cricket to discuss getting more kids and local schools involved in playing cricket and using the facilities at Parliament Hill Fields.
32. The Learning Team have engaged over 27,000 learning participants on Hampstead Heath so far this year (April 2024 – February 2025). This includes school, play and youth engagement. Special projects have included a careers day at Hampstead Heath, as part of the London Careers Festival. Participating students had the opportunity to meet inspiring role models from across the Environment Department and explore various job roles in fields such as ecology, learning, environmental resilience, and carbon removal. The City Corporation is a partner of the London Careers Festival, an annual event that connects young people with career opportunities across a range of sectors, while raising awareness and building aspirations.

The Heath is inclusive and welcoming

Priority 6: Diversity and equality

33. The Ponds Access Project has been completed and the final snagging at the Men's Pond is due for completion in April.

34. The sandpit area at Golders Hill Park remains closed to the public. A NCIL funding application for £65,000 to Barnet Council was submitted in December 2024. The NCIL funding was successful and the funding will ensure the sandpit area is completed, the adjoining playground is renovated, access is improved with five pieces of play equipment to be replaced with DDA-compliant play items. This will ensure the playground is inclusive and welcoming and meets play safety standards. An external contractor will be appointed, and it is hoped the work can be completed by the summer holidays. Officers are grateful for this new partnership with Barnet Council and look forward to continuing to work together.

Together we care for the Heath

Priority 7: Increased sense of collective ownership and personal responsibility

35. The Golders Hill Park Zoo Team have been running a competition at the Zoo for children to submit a drawing of the Scottish wildcats. The winners will be announced shortly, and they will win a year's adoption and their pictures will be displayed on the enclosure.

36. A separate report provides an update on Heath Hands' work on the Heath since the last committee meeting.

Together we care for the Heath

Priority 8: Visitor behaviour is pro-environmental

37. Practical volunteer sessions continue to be popular with Heath Hands in both Golders Hill Park and the Hill Garden, with three sessions a week being hosted by the Gardening Team. The tasks have included canopy reductions, clearing compartments and a hard prune of the apple trees in preparation for the renovation works taking place at the Pergola.

38. The Great British Spring Clean, a Keep Britain Tidy campaign to encourage people to get involved with litter picks, took place between 21 March to 6 April. There were three litter picks organised by Heath Hands with around 20 volunteers. The groups consisted of a mix of public, Heath Hands volunteers and youth volunteers focusing on the Parliament Hill area.

Together we care for the Heath

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

39. Officers have provided updates to both committees on ongoing public health and safety matters occurring on West Heath, including the accumulation of litter that must be collected and disposed of by officers, including litter from sexual activity, used drug needles, and drugs. Officers continue to liaise with the Metropolitan Police as appropriate to address illegal activities, in addition to increased patrols by the Hampstead Heath Constabulary, and are working with local stakeholders to inform our further actions. Officers continue to carry out daily patrols of the Heath to ensure visitors adhere to the byelaws and to assist with any public enquiries.
40. On Sunday 2 March, a planned event occurred in West Heath that was organised to protest posters that had recently been hung by members of the public in West Heath that were in opposition to West Heath's use for cruising. The Hampstead Heath Constabulary did an excellent job engaging with the participants, supported by the Metropolitan Police. The event finished by 3:00pm.

Together we care for the Heath

Priority 10: Responsible management

41. Following an extended disinfection and descaling of the outlets in 2024, a report confirmed that Legionnaires is no longer detected at the Heath Extension changing rooms. Units that were installed take accurate readings of the site usage, flow and the temperatures provide 24/7 monitoring. All the water running into the changing rooms is now fed by the mains, bypassing the header tanks, which is aiding the flushing system, and avoiding problems with stagnation which contribute to the occurrence of Legionella. Weekly flushing also takes place to prevent any build-up of contamination, and sampling will occur every six months to align with the end and the start of the rugby season.
42. The Lido sauna closed at the end of October 2024 for essential maintenance work, as the wooden benches and supporting structures needed to be replaced. This is due to the high demand and usage of the facility (approximately 180 swimmers per day). Work was delayed because of the long lead-in times for the materials over the festive period. The sauna reopened on 7 January 2025.
43. The Lido was closed between 3 - 14 February for the complete replacement of the electrical switchgear for the building. The new installation was completed successfully within the timescale and will now allow other projects to move forward, such as the installation of more PVs on the Lido roof.

44. During the Lido closure, further works began on the terraces, which included resurfacing the concrete in front of the cafe and gym. The perimeter walls to the north of the building have been inspected and require repairs to tackle the cracks and subsidence. This work will be addressed in the autumn.
45. A lot of identified works were scheduled in the Cyclical Work Programme for Golders Hill Park and will be completed in the coming months. This includes a new Lemur shed which has been installed and completed. Other works include repairs to the staff yard, re-wiring of the office, sheds and new electrics, lighting and CCTV, repairs to the pathways, resurfacing many of the tarmac paths throughout the park and refurbishment of the cafe toilets. The toilet works commenced on 24 February 2025 and will take six weeks. Portaloo's are in-situ for the duration of the works.
46. A report on the Heath five-year business plan is the subject of a separate report to this committee.

Additional relevant matters

47. Appointments have been made for the roles of Head Gardener at Golders Hill Park, Operative Ranger at Golders Hill Park, Operative Rangers at Parliament Hill, Operative Rangers at West Heath, Kenwood and Heath Extension. The Head of Development & Partnerships and Constabulary Sergeant positions have been posted, and the annual recruitment for seasonal lifeguards is underway.
48. A new Project Manager was appointed in January 2025 to oversee, build and manage the new bespoke Leisure Management System with XN Leisure 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 autumn 2025.
49. The English National Cross-Country Championships returned to Parliament Hill Fields on 22 February, attracting thousands of runners to the iconic and challenging course. Known for its demanding terrain, the recent heavy rains made conditions particularly muddy and treacherous, testing the endurance and skill of all participants. Parliament Hill has a long-standing connection with the National Cross-Country Championships. The venue first hosted the Women's Championship in 1950 and the Men's Championship in 1957. Since then, it has remained one of the most revered locations known throughout the athletics world as the home of cross-country running, hosting either the men's or women's championships on multiple occasions. The Championships follow a three-year rotation between the South, Midlands, and North, meaning Parliament Hill

typically hosts the event once every three years. This rotation helps preserve the land while giving different regions the chance to experience the National.

50. The English National Cross-Country Championships is more than just an elite sporting event; it is a powerful platform for inspiring young people, promoting lifelong fitness, and supporting the national health and well-being agenda. For many young athletes, the National Championships serve as their first experience of high-level competition, igniting a passion for running and personal achievement. Schools and clubs across the country use this event to engage young runners, encouraging them to set goals and experience the thrill of competing on an iconic course. The Highgate Harriers put in a phenomenal effort to secure third place in the team standings—a fantastic achievement on home soil. The club's hard work and determination shone through, and the atmosphere was electric as they battled it out for a well-deserved podium finish.

51. We have several significant events taking place at the Heath between now and the next committee in June. Between 9 April and 21 April we will be welcoming back the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain's Easter Fair at Parliament Hill Fields, a traditional Easter fair featuring a variety of rides, games, and food stalls suitable for all ages. From 7 – 11 May, the Affordable Art Fair will take place at the Lower Fairground Site. The event showcases contemporary art from over 100 galleries. Finally, there will be a Race for Life event starting at East Heath, featuring 5k and 10k runs to support Cancer Research UK. Details of events taking place in late summer will be provided at June's committee.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Financial implications

52. No implications.

Resource implications

53. No implications.

Legal implications

54. No implications.

Risk implications

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

Equalities implications

56. No implications.

Climate implications

57. Included within the business plan for 2025-26 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

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

Conclusion

59. This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Hampstead Heath since the last meeting of the respective committees.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Tables on wind speed closure events.

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