

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	Dated: 21 October 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 16 July 2025.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main report

Report format

1. This report is formatted in alignment with the five strategic themes of the Highgate Wood Management Plan. Additional relevant items, if any, are included in an “Additional Relevant Items” section.

Sustainable woodland management

2. Highgate Wood has experienced three heatwaves during the summer, as well as a sustained drought which continued into the beginning of August. These conditions have led to further decline in a number of trees already vulnerable to drought stress, including several veteran beech trees.
3. Highgate Wood has a number of monolith or habitat trees, which are managed dead trees retained for their high biodiversity value, providing a home for specialist dead wood invertebrates, various fungal species and also birds and bats. These trees require careful cyclical management and, following a survey in August, we have reduced a number across the Wood for safety reasons.
4. With the end of the summer and the associated drop in visitor numbers, the Highgate Wood Team and Heath Hands volunteers have started preparing areas for cyclical tree inspections which will be supported by the North London Open Spaces Tree Team. These inspections will generate a list of tree works which will then be carried out over the winter months.

Culture & heritage and the Roman kiln project.

5. During the Highgate Wood Community Heritage Day on 7 September, the Friends of the Highgate Roman Kiln (FoHRK) led scheduled walks up to the site of the 2nd Century AD Roman kiln, where there were a number of associated activities for all ages making pots.
6. Officers from the Natural Environment Heritage Team continue to work with FoHRK to deliver the outcomes of the ‘Firing London’s Imagination’ project. This

National Lottery-funded project aims to conserve, re-display and interpret the second century Roman kiln, which was discovered in Highgate Wood in 1968.

7. The now-restored kiln remains on display in the Information Hut, along with an interim display interpreting the kiln, its natural setting and significance to the story of Roman era London.
8. Following two successful firings in 2024, volunteers from FoHRK and Turning Earth, Highgate, have created c. 400 pots for the third firing of the kiln planned for Saturday 13 September. The research findings from last year's firings have been used to inform the methodology, and experiences were shared at an academic and practitioners forum hosted by the School of Classics at Oxford.
9. The Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) programme of work was delivered for the second time in July 2025, with 15 A-level students participating over five days at Turning Earth's studio in Highgate.
10. The Heritage Officer who supported and delivered many of the project's activities left the City Corporation in August 2025 and we are currently recruiting for her successor.
11. Officers from Natural Environment and City Surveyor's Department are working on proposals for the refurbishment of the Information Hut, to display the kiln and new interpretation, telling the story of the kiln within the natural environment and unique nature of the ancient wood. A number of quotes have been received, and officers are currently identifying the budgets available so that they can present options to Members for their approval, followed by scheduling of works prior to the end of the project in May 2026.

Facilities & access

12. A long-awaited programme of fence repairs was completed last week on the perimeter fence on Muswell Hill Road, repairing defective fence posts. This line of timber fencing is over 12 years old, and although the panels are still in reasonable condition many of the timber posts have rotted below ground level, necessitating the installation of concrete spurs to the defective posts. Further fence repairs are planned over the forthcoming weeks for the play area and the fence and gates around the Pavilion Cafe Garden.

13. The cricket season finished with final matches taking place on 6 and 7 September, with preparations now underway for the start of the football season. The team has been busy carrying out various repairs to the pitch and line marking for the first games of the season.

Cafe remarketing

14. As previously reported and following approval and instructions from this Committee, the cafe at Highgate Wood is being remarketed, inviting proposals from all interested parties, including existing operators. As a registered charity, we have an obligation to ensure that we are achieving the best overall outcome for the Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Kilburn charity itself and our visitors when we lease our spaces commercially, which requires us to competitively remarket the café space in the building.
15. All cafes at North London Open Spaces, including the one at Highgate Wood, are currently operating under tenancies at will, which are not meant to be long-term arrangements, and it has been many years since the cafe offer was holistically reviewed and marketed competitively. This remarketing process will provide greater clarity and long-term security for our café operators and the Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Kilburn charity, supporting investment in the site and enhancing the visitor experience. We are doing this with a specialist agent to promote the sites more widely, reaching beyond our usual channels, and to ensure as many suitable operators as possible are aware and able to express interest.
16. Officers recognise and value the cafes as hubs of community and gathering places and seek to build upon this. The remarketing is not a purely profit-driven process. Consideration will be given to numerous criteria, including café concept, menu and food offer, environmental management, community and social value, management approach, experience and references, as well as the financial offer and overall strength of the business plan. This approach has been directly informed by the previous process and experience in 2016, and it benefits from the work done following that process to ensure the evaluation reflects several important factors, noted above.
17. The remarketing process began in mid-July and the deadline for bids was 24 September. The remarketing process received a very strong response, and Officers from NLOS and City Surveyor's Department are now reviewing the submissions and conferring with the agent and will prepare a report with

recommendations for decision of Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee.

Community & Education

18. Highgate Wood's Community Heritage Day occurred on Sunday 7 September and was supported by a number of the regular stall holders and local community organisations. The event was very well attended this year with a warm sunny early autumn day and plenty of activities for adults and children, including pottery and the popular dog show. Local community groups were well represented and everyone involved had plenty of interest and a chance to engage with neighbouring stallholders.
19. Heath Hands volunteer sessions have recommenced with the end of the bird nesting season, and the Highgate Wood Team is planning additional sessions this winter through to March 2026.
20. Haringey's Conservation and Woodland Management Team has set up a new Ancient Woodland Network. Friends of groups from Haringey's ancient woodland sites attended the group's inaugural meeting in Highgate Wood on 11 September. The Highgate Wood Senior Ranger provided a guided walk around the site to talk about woodland management, climate change resilience, and nature conservation.
21. The Friends of Queen's Wood have also initiated a small woodland management and conservation group to share knowledge between Highgate Wood and Queen's Wood. Queen's Wood also took part in the hedgehog survey in June this year.
22. The guided walks programme over the summer was very popular: there have been four bat walks since mid-July and all were very well attended. The moth evening led by a member of the Highgate Wood Consultative Group was very popular, with a very attentive and group of people attending.

Climate Resilience and Nature Conservation

23. The results of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) Highgate Wood 2025 hedgehog survey are very exciting. This year's study - which ran between 12 and 4 July - recorded hedgehogs on 19 of the motion-activated cameras. this

represents a significant increase from the single individual recorded in the same period in 2017. These findings suggest the hedgehog population at Highgate Wood is thriving, with hedgehogs detected at two thirds of the deployed cameras, marking a major success for local biodiversity and wildlife conservation efforts. The 2025 survey was supported by a number of volunteers, including Heath Hands.

24. ZSL has released a report on the wider hedgehog population on Hampstead Heath comparing the survey data collected in 2024 with the earlier survey report carried out in 2021, and the findings are encouraging with a significant increase in hedgehogs caught on camera. ZSL will now carry out a population density assessment using the 2024 data and previous data back to 2017.

25. The Team has installed lines of dead hedging between Lodge Gate and New Gate, where many people were still running or walking off the main path. Before the pandemic this area had an understory of ivy and other plants which gave some protection against erosion and compaction, but with several years of social distancing during the pandemic the area became heavily used and much of the vegetation was lost. The dead hedging will be retained until the area has recovered.

Corporate & strategic implications

Strategic implications

26. This report furthers strategic aims of the new Highgate Wood Management Plan and the Corporate Plan.

Financial implications

27. No implications.

Resource implications

28. No implications.

Legal implications

29. No implications.

Risk implications

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

Equalities implications

31. No implications.

Climate implications

32. 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. No implications.

Security implications

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

Conclusion

34. This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Highgate Wood since the last Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee meeting on 16 July 2025.

Appendices: none

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