

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	Dated: 3 February 2026
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 last update to committee of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee meeting on 21 October 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. All scheduled tree inspections for Highgate Wood are up to date, with priority tree works planned to commence in January 2026 and continue through to March. Recently joined members of the Highgate Wood Team have been trained in the safe operation of the Mobile Elevated Work Platform (MEWP), which is a critical piece of equipment in managing the site’s trees. The Highgate Wood Team has worked collaboratively with Transport for London (TFL) to enable several trees growing along the boundary fence on the Highgate Wood side to be made safe following recent tree inspections. The NLOS Tree Team continues to support the Highgate Wood Team in completing the scheduled tree inspection process and providing resources to help them complete priority tree-safety work.
3. The Highgate Wood Team has had a series of site meetings over the last six months to discuss a programme of holly management at various locations within the woodland. The works proposed will be on a small scale, focusing on the edge of the sports field and some of the old conservation areas. The holly will be reduced in height, or in some instances coppiced, but there are no plans for removal. Holly is an important native woodland species with multiple conservation benefits, including its value as a refuge to wildlife such as hibernating hedgehogs. Holly also has a value for its carbon capture benefits as a vigorous evergreen tree species, which continues to grow and remove carbon dioxide during the winter when other native deciduous trees are dormant.

Culture & heritage

5. The Heritage Officer who supported and delivered many of the Roman Kiln project's activities left the City Corporation in August 2025 and we are pleased to announce the recruitment of a new Officer, who has started working on both the Highgate Wood Roman Kiln project but also is also supporting the Team working on the restoration of the Hill Garden Pergola.
6. Officers from Natural Environment and City Surveyor's Department continue to work to identify affordable options to deliver the agreed outputs of the 'Firing London's Imagination' project, including funding to address the urgent repairs to the Information Centre's existing roof, which requires replacement as a priority. Additional external funds have been identified to replace the existing roof to ensure that the Kiln remains adequately protected. Contractors have installed temporary patching on the roof where there was water ingress and will be returning later in January to commence the roof replacement works. This work will be completed before the 31 March 2026.

Facilities & Access

7. Subsidence works on one of the lodges at Archway Gate started in November with the access route and works area cordoned off week commencing 10 November. Gypsy Gate has been closed to the public, and the pathway from Gypsy Gate to the property also fenced off to the public due to vehicle movements. The works are due to take six to nine months to complete. The interior of the property has been stripped of all fittings in preparation for underpinning, which will commence week commencing 5 January. The pathway from Gypsy Gate to the property has been reinforced for heavy vehicle traffic during the next phase of works.
8. Additional external funds have been identified to replace part of the trim trail which was condemned in a recent ROSPA inspection. The wooden apparatus is over twenty years old and requires replacement. Quotes were obtained and a contractor has been selected to supply and install the replacement equipment. Works will be completed by the end of March.
9. The complete refurbishment of the Pavilion Cafe toilets started the first week in December and was scheduled to be completed before the Christmas break. The contractor did manage to complete the majority of the work by the 24 December and will be returning to site week commencing 5 January to complete the

refurbishment. The new surfaces and sanitary ware have been designed to be easy to clean, and it is hoped that the public response will be positive once the facilities are open later this month.

10. UK Power Networks contacted the Highgate Wood Team to request permission to carry out replacement to a section of an old 1950's high-voltage cable between Cranley and Onslow gates. The cable insulation contains a layer of high-viscosity oil which has leaked and now poses an environmental hazard. Works will involve excavation of the defective section of cable and any contaminated soil. These works will require a license agreement for access to City of London Corporation land and carrying out the required cable repairs and decontamination.
11. The City Surveyor's Department has informed Officers that they are projecting a significant overspend for the current financial year on reactive maintenance works, and as a result, spending controls are being put into place through 31 March 2026. This will result in prioritising absolutely necessary tasks and those that are statutorily required, or those that can be funded alternatively, and deprioritising other works. It is hoped that the ongoing investment and improvements being made via the City Surveyor's Department's Cyclical Works Programme will improve the overall state of the estate, thus reducing the need for reactive repairs.

Community & education

12. Since October there have been 14 Heath Hands volunteer sessions with a focus on holly management and protecting the main bluebell area at the northern end of Highgate Wood. Sessions have involved reinstatement of dead hedging at various locations within the woodland, and some sessions removing ivy and laurel.
13. The guided walks programme has proved increasingly popular with the public. Since October there have been a number of very popular guided walks including two bat walks, a walk on trees and fungi, and the autumn and winter guided walks.

Climate resilience

14. In the previous Highgate Wood Assistant Director update in October, Officers reported on Zoological Society of London's (ZSL) Highgate Wood 2025 hedgehog survey and the significant increase in recorded hedgehog sightings in

Highgate Wood. The Team will continue the conservation work to provide appropriate habitat and refuge areas for the hedgehog population. We will also continue the work to enable hedgehogs to move to neighbouring gardens to forage and expand the population in what is still a challenging environment for this vulnerable species. Heath Hands volunteers will continue to support the hedgehog conservation work.

15. The Highgate Wood Team has been surveying annually the condition of 341 oak trees within the woodland for the past 15 years. These trees have been carefully monitored for canopy health and general condition, and this year there were no recorded deaths within the survey group. The total oak population of the Wood is estimated at 1,346, of which 252 (around 19%) are now dead. These dead oak trees continue to have great nature conservation value as standing dead wood, but require regular monitoring, and careful management in terms of public safety. Ancient woodland sites are increasingly recognised for their additional value in terms of storing carbon over very long timescales and their critical role in the battle against climate change.

Corporate & strategic implications

Strategic implications

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

Financial implications

17. No implications.

Resource implications

18. No implications.

Legal implications

19. No implications.

Risk implications

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

Equalities implications

21. No implications.

Climate implications

22. 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

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

Conclusion

24. This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to Highgate Wood since the last update to Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee meeting on 21 October 2025.

Appendices: N/A

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