

City of London Hampstead Heath Ponds Project

Non-Statutory Process for Information Giving and Consultation

26 November 2013 – 17 February 2014

Context for the Non-Statutory Consultation

This document outlines a non-statutory process of information giving and consultation to be carried out with support from Resources for Change (www.r4c.org.uk) a specialist engagement organisation employed by the City of London to offer expert and independent advice. This non-statutory consultation process will be guided by reference to the City of London's Communication and Engagement Strategy. The Strategy provides a broad framework for this non-statutory consultation process, as well as for the City's overall communication and engagement approach.

As set out in the Strategy's timeline, the non-statutory process of information giving and consultation is being rolled out at a key milestone in the Ponds Project: the development of the Preferred Options report for meeting the City of London's legal obligations to improve the safety of dams in both the Hampstead and Highgate chains of ponds to prevent them from failing, whilst maintaining the site's natural aspect as an open space. It will run from 26 November 2013 – 17 February 2014 (12 weeks). The non-statutory process is intended to support and compliment the range of other communication and engagement activities described in the Strategy, including the extensive and detailed engagement of the Ponds Project Stakeholder Group.

Note: The first two weeks of the public process from 26 November will largely focus on information giving and consultation via online methods. This will enable the process to take account of the City's internal committees' approvals process (Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Management Committee, 25 November).

Purpose of the Non-Statutory Consultation Process

Working with the Ponds Project Stakeholder Group and informed by activities to date, options have been narrowed down to those that best meet the Design Objectives, Principles and Philosophy as originally set out in the Constrained Options Report. It is the Preferred Options for each chain of ponds, which the Non-Statutory Consultation will be focused upon.

The primary purpose of the consultation process is to inform the public about what is being done and why. Full details of the timeline of the project to date, how we have reached the current position in terms of the site constraints, hydrology and the legal context that has framed the development of the Preferred Options, will be given as part of the information giving process.

People will be given the opportunity to inform the City of London's choice of solution based on the Preferred Options report for the Hampstead and Highgate pond chains. This will involve a simple indication as to which option they prefer; however, the consultation will include an opportunity for open responses that will allow people to comment on the options by subject heading: such as amenity; wildlife; landscape; and water quality.

There will still be a planning application stage and this will involve a formal consultation for planning approval.

What the consultation element (seeking public views) will not cover

Whilst all comments will be invited and recorded, to avoid confusing the purpose of the non-statutory public consultation and / or raising unrealistic expectations the consultation will **not** specifically:

Consult on the legal context

The consultation will not cover any challenge to the legality of the need to safeguard the pond dams. Resources for Change will only consult on the proposals to address the City's legal obligations. It is not R4C's role at this stage to engage in consultation on the appropriateness or otherwise of the current UK law. This would cause confusion as to the purpose and role of the consultation.

Consult on the science

The consultation will not seek public views on the science behind the hydrology or associated modelling.

What the Consultation will achieve

We cannot expect to walk away from the consultation with a clear consensus or support, i.e. we may not get a clearly favoured option or approval from the public for the work on each of the chains. However it will highlight issues (significant or otherwise) that the City Corporation or Atkins need to take account of in approving or refining the chosen options to address the concerns of the public about the impact of works on the Heath and it will give a sense of where public feeling is in its reaction to the proposals.

Who we will seek to reach

There has been significant engagement already with key stakeholders which will continue. The purpose of this process, both its information giving and consultation, is therefore to 'reach out' to others who may be affected and have had less involvement to date, with a focus on those with a defined interest in the issues raised by the Ponds Project work. These are identified as:

- Users of the ponds and immediate surrounds
- Those living within the vicinity of pond chain areas
- Users of the Heath
- Those having a specialist interest in the Heath (e.g. bird watchers)
- Off site - those within potentially impacted area in the situation of a dam failure
- Those who may potentially (or have reason to think they will) be impacted by the Ponds Project when works take place
- Wider public (considered beyond scope apart from information sharing)

The non-statutory public consultation will therefore focus on the following groupings identified within the City of London's Communication and Engagement Strategy, based on the nature of their interest in the issues raised by the ponds safeguarding work as listed in the bullets above.

- Individual members of the public
- Recreational groups
- Advisory and user groups
- Neighbours and residents
- Wildlife and science groups
- Religious and ethnic groups
- Volunteers
- Local schools and youth groups
- Those with local business interests

Baseline data

The City's existing data would be used to ensure that outreach to and coverage of the above listed groups in the roll out of the process is robust. We would expect this would include the following kinds of data:

- City of London statistics on visitors/users
- Data currently held by the City on the residents', advisory and user groups what they are and their contact details
- Contact data already supplied by individuals who have registered their interest in the Ponds Project via previous information giving and consultation exercises undertaken by the City of London.

The following groups are either already involved or there are separate, defined mechanisms that already exist by which the City of London is able to engage them at the appropriate time; this may not be necessary until the statutory consultation process:

- Hampstead Heath Consultative and Management Committees
- The Ponds Project Stakeholder Group, which has representatives from Heath user & interest groups and local residents' groups.
- Staff
- Local, regional and national elected representatives
- Local Authorities with jurisdiction adjacent to the Heath
- Statutory consultees

Proposed Information Giving and Consultation Methods

Both the information given and the consultation questions asked need to be clear. The topic is extremely complicated. It is important that plain English and precise, non-ambiguous language are used. Clear explanations should be provided of any project specific terms used. There is a lot of detail informing the need for the project and its options development which is too much to present in the public consultation. However those reached by the public process also need to have easy access to all the background information, including information on the legal and scientific background, should they wish to consult it in more detail.

The following activities are proposed to help ensure the public (with a focus on those affected or potentially affected) are informed and able to comment:

Public meetings

Note: We have not chosen this method since in our experience it will not reach or give a voice to the general public as effectively as the methods below.

On site methods

Parliament Hill and mobile caravan drop-ins

At Parliament Hill, a simple, visual display situated in the garage space in the staff yard near the café where it is clearly visible from the path. The purpose of the drop-ins would be to maximise access for the public to information about the project and an opportunity to give feedback on the Preferred Options at a very busy Heath location. The drop-ins' displays and facilities would include the following material:

- Information boards summarising the project timeline to date
- Information boards summarising the options considered and their pros and cons
- A more detailed summary (with images) of the preferred option(s) on a handout for people to take away
- Questionnaires to give feedback on the options for people to fill in or take away
- A post box for questionnaires to be returned
- Postcards for people to take away which signpost where further information and feedback opportunities can be accessed.
- Information collection pin boards to gain a sample of visitor numbers and their profiles (age, gender, etc) for use when the drop-ins are staffed.

This should be open to the public as much as possible over the consultation period as an unmanned display and be staffed at times of high footfall.

In parallel, a mobile caravan unit, encapsulating the broadly the same range visual information, (adapted to fit the available space) and feedback materials will be available to widen the coverage of the drop-in facility across the Heath, particularly for the Hampstead chain of ponds.

Site information

Information boards should be located at all sites where works are proposed. The purpose of the site information is to enable people to understand the Preferred Options in their immediate location and get an enhanced understanding of what the impacts of them might be. It also engages Heath-users attention in the Ponds Project and its proposals at a specific point of interaction or interest for them

This site information would include:

- Summary information boards on the proposed changes
- Instructions on how to comment / location of other information
- Visual markers and other methods of helping people understand the proposals
- Dispensers for the consultation postcards

Guided walks at key areas

The public would be able to meet staff from both Atkins and the City of London to hear about the options on the Ponds Project work first hand. This would be at the key areas on the Heath such as the Model Boating Pond, Men's Bathing Pond, Highgate No. 1 pond, Mixed Bathing Pond and the Hampstead No. 2 pond. This would provide an opportunity to 'ask the experts' and would complement the on-going work the Heath management team have already done. This kind of 'on the spot' information giving will make the work and options more meaningful and easier for people to understand. The Guided Walks at Key Areas would be advertised by the City of London for example in the local press and on boards around the Heath to indicate which days they were available.

Participants would then be encouraged to complete questionnaires (i.e. the same as those provided at the drop-ins) at the end of the talk, having had their interest and understanding stimulated by that. If possible, there should also be pin boards set up for basic information collection (age, gender, etc.) at these Key Areas to gauge the use of the events. This is because not all people may complete questionnaires, and may just be attending to gain understanding what is happening and only responding if they have a concern or problem.

Involvement of City of London staff

City of London staff will be briefed on the project and the non-statutory process. This will enable selected staff to provide additional support at the Heath drop-ins and at the walks at key areas. A key benefit will be that, on a more ad-hoc basis, staff will then be able to provide informed, spontaneous assistance to the public and direct Heath users to the planned information and feedback opportunities described above.

Off site methods

Stalls at strategic public locations

To be carried out by Resources for Change in collaboration with City and Atkins staff within the area potentially:

- The downstream community
- Living within vicinity of pond chain areas
- Adjacent to transport hubs e.g. over-ground stations

The primary purpose of the stalls would be to provide information on the ponds project including its purpose and rationale. Feedback would also be possible via the stalls. The stalls would comprise:

- Information boards summarising the project timeline and options considered and their pros and cons
- Map of the site
- A more detailed summary (with images) of the preferred option(s) on a handout for people to take away



- Questionnaires to give feedback on the options for people to fill in or take away
- A post box for questionnaires to be returned
- Postcards for people to take away which signpost where further information and feedback opportunities can be accessed
- Information collection pin boards to gain a sample of visitor numbers and their profiles
- Pin boards for feedback on people's preferred options

Consultation Support Materials

We propose to develop the following consultation components to support the above activities and enable the public to be informed and to comment:

Questionnaire

The consultation questionnaire would be available online and also as a paper take-away from consultation stalls, the Parliament Hill and caravan drop-ins and guided walks. This would provide an introductory summary and links to the web based information.

Postcard

Primarily a simple postcard with a set of visual images of the ponds on the front (possibly showing the ponds at a number of periods in history plus the proposed options) could be used as an information giving tool. The postcards would then have simple summary on the back, locations for further information and link to the website information and an on-line questionnaire.

As well as being accessed at the Parliament Hill & caravan drop-ins, the guided walks, the site information points, and the consultation stalls as described above, the postcard should be made widely available around the Heath (café, swimming ponds). They could also be distributed in cafes and other venues with the potentially affected areas (local vicinity of the works or potential areas affected by dam failure).

Online information

Information is already available on the City of London website. However, its location is not immediately obvious and so a clear hyperlink is required via the other information-giving materials.

Record Keeping

Responses will all be kept anonymous (and we will highlight this approach in the questionnaire). All of the consultation methods could request people's contact details should they wish to be kept informed and this information would be collated separately in order to be made available to the City of London. Analysis may be undertaken with regards to respondents' post codes (the first part and first digit of the second part).

A full final report will be produced to inform the City of London and Atkins so that they can take account of public feedback in their decision-making and final chosen option. A two-sided summary report with visuals should also be produced for wider public circulation.

Feedback Loop

In addition to the above, we would expect the City of London provide some kind of report-back on the feedback that they have received from the consultation via the above reporting and to share this publicly. This 'feedback loop' would for example reflect on and address the key findings reported from the consultation and state how Atkins/City of London had been able to incorporate them (or not) in the next stages of decision-making. At the same time information should also be provided on what the next steps are for the project, including any future consultation opportunities for the public. This information as well as being posted on the City's website could also be circulated to those stakeholders who have provided their contact details via the consultation.

Publicity

Work will be required around the advertising and publicity of the public process such as local media, leaflet drops and posters around the Heath for the launch of the non-statutory consultation process, which will be undertaken by the City of London with additional advice from Resources for Change. This will include the announcement of the drop-ins and site information, availability of online questionnaire and postcards; specific dates for activities such as the guided walks at key areas, and stalls in public locations.