

Summary of the Hampstead Heath Ponds Project Information Giving and Consultation 26 November 2013 – 17 February 2014

What are the Hampstead Heath ponds?

The ponds on Hampstead Heath are all man-made. They were built as reservoirs for drinking water around 300 years ago and are fed by natural springs. There are substantial dams on most of Hampstead Heath's ponds and most of these are made of earth. Over the years, the ponds have been constantly maintained and some of the dams have been reinforced with concrete and metal sheet piling.

Although there are around thirty ponds on the Heath, this project focuses on eleven, which form two 'chains' of ponds – the Highgate chain and Hampstead chain.

What is the Ponds Project about?

The Hampstead Heath Ponds Project is intended to meet 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 in extreme rainfall and major storms, whilst maintaining the natural environment.

Two options for the works have been produced for each chain of ponds. These options have been produced by Atkins, the engineers advising the City of London, in consultation with the Ponds Project Stakeholder Group (which is comprised of local amenity and residents' groups) with advice from environmental specialists (such as ecologists, landscape architects, heritage and water quality experts).

What was the consultation and information giving process?

26 November 2013 – 17 February 2014 (12 weeks)

This was a non-statutory process of information giving and consultation carried out as part of the Ponds Project 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.

There were two parts to the process which were:

- Information giving - to raise awareness of the project among a wide range of Heath users and local residents.
- Consultation - to gather feedback from the public to inform the option selection process for the project.

What were we consulting on?

The consultation was to get views on the two options for each chain of ponds.

Each chain of ponds has been considered as a whole system. Water flows down through the ponds from the top pond to the bottom pond and eventually off the Heath. This means that any work done to a pond affects all of the ponds below that pond in the chain.

All the options reduce flooding downstream. Flooding will be controlled, by creating new temporary water storage areas in the middle of each pond chain. These storage areas will be created, by raising the heights of some dams and building a new dam. Floodwater will then be stored temporarily in the ponds in the centre of each chain.

It was decided early on that increased storage of water should be focussed on those ponds that are in less sensitive locations, in order to limit the visual impacts and tree loss elsewhere.

After the flood has passed, the stored water will be released into the River Fleet tunnel system. This is a tunnel that runs under the city and carries the old river. The excess flood water in the biggest floods will pass along open shallow grassed overflow channels called spillways, which are designed to pass floodwater safely around or over a dam. By storing more water in the ponds, the speed and volume of this excess floodwater will be less, and there will be less risk of damage to the dams.

Who was informed and who responded?

During the 12 week process a huge amount of information was disseminated through two displays on the Heath (over 4000 people face-to-face) and personnel giving out information on the street (over 800 people face-to-face), newspapers (joint circulation of 120,000 readers) and web site information, direct postal mailing (over 79,000 households and businesses), emailing of community and residents' groups, guided walks, distribution of many posters and postcards, use of social media and the production of a short video (over 500 viewings).

That's a huge number of people made aware of the project and given an opportunity to respond.

Many of you we did not hear further from. Others visited the displays or spoke to us on the street to get more information, or to deal with a particular point or concern.

Over 1000 of you said what you thought about the project to staff at one the Heath displays, which was noted and over 1000 of you completed one of the more detailed questionnaires.

Thank you for taking the time and effort to give us your comments. All of your comments have been recorded and will be considered.

What did those who responded think?

A large number of you chose not to respond to the questionnaire that was available or only made comments when we met you at one of the Displays. It was a staff observation that many people visiting the Heath displays and having street conversations were positive or had no particular views on the matter. They also observed that those making the effort to complete a detailed questionnaire tended to be people with a strong concern or view.

Amongst the numbers who did complete a questionnaire: mainly people who live close to the Heath and who are regular users, there is a strong body of concern against the whole project. These concerns are to do with increases in dam height and perceived negative impacts on the Heath's amenity (especially for swimmers), its landscape or wildlife. Some respondents challenge the legal basis for the work having to be done.

However, many of you said that you supported the improved safety that the work would bring to those in the potentially impacted downstream communities. There are a further number of people who feel that the proposed works could create an opportunity for improvements to the Heath, especially for wildlife.

Others felt that the water should be dealt with downstream of the Heath for example through better drainage or just dealt with through a much lower specification of works such as ongoing repairs, 'softer' engineering and water management such as planting, or simply that it was more appropriate to address the issue through better emergency response.

Of the comments made on the options for the Ponds Project, a limited number are specific in relation to option choice or their design elements, with many more being common to both options for both pond chains.

Views on all the individual options are a mix of positive and negative responses. There is no significant preference between the options for either pond chain, though the comments do give a clearer picture of which issues are important to the public in making the final decision.

So, the comments do help to inform a set of design criteria which would include:

- Preference for earth banks over walls
- Preference for natural style landscaping of dams and features over 'man-made' constructions.
- Paths to have proper surfacing
- Access and safety of children and families needs to be shown, especially, but not exclusively for the Model Boating Pond
- The need to maintain the present visual rural / countryside landscape and current (or improved) amenity across the Heath
- Opportunities to create and enhance wildlife habitat should be taken where possible
- As far as possible views should be maintained.

There were also specific requests for more detail on a number of aspects including the overflow channels (the spillways) and also the Catchpit dam on the Hampstead chain of ponds. People want to know a lot more about what will happen during the actual work, how it will be managed and the impacts.

How did we do?

Many of you commented positively on the effort being made to give information and keep people informed and the quality of the information as well as the level of effort being put into consultation. Some of you challenged the narrow scope of the consultation and the limited options whilst others felt this was appropriate and realistic. Others challenged the quality of information provided and the integrity of the approach and the work we are doing.

What now?

The comments received through the consultation will be examined by the City of London and used to inform the next stages of the project.

The expected future activities and timeline are detailed below:

- March 2014 - Report on public consultation produced and posted on City of London website at www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/pondsproject
- April 2014 onwards - Detailed plans and environmental assessment produced by Atkins in support of planning application.
- June 2014 - City of London decides on an option and posts decision and rationale on their website and on Heath notices.
- July 2014 - Submission of planning application to London Borough of Camden who will carry out statutory public consultation, before deciding whether the planning application should be approved.

- 2015 - Public informed about plans for implementation of the works and works planned to start (if planning permission granted).

Construction of works

The City of London appointed the contractor, BAM Nuttall, in March 2014, to form part of the project team, to input into the design and advise on implementation to limit impact on the Heath and users. The works will be well planned and sensitive to the existing uses of the Heath. To achieve this, we propose the following:

- **Programme** – the contractor will carefully plan the construction programme to ensure the works cause minimal disruption and inconvenience to local people.
- **Minimum impact principle** – the contractor will aim to cause minimum disruption to users and the Heath. They will ensure that the equipment used is as small as possible, with minimal traffic movements along agreed routes. They will try where possible to use material excavated on-site.

Keeping informed

Users and neighbours of the Heath will be kept informed about the works, with information available on the City of London website at www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/pondsproject

Finally, thank you

Thank you for taking the time to read and respond, to get involved and to help us make the best decision we can for the Heath.