

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee	21 July 2014
Subject:	Public
Annual Review of volunteering for 2013-14	
Report of:	For Information
Director of Open Spaces	
<p>Summary</p> <p>49,816 hours of volunteering were achieved across the Open Spaces during 2013-14, an increase of 4,397 hours on the 2012-13 figure and the highest ever amount.</p> <p>Volunteers continue to be involved in a variety of roles and undertake a diverse range of activities that offer them the opportunity to engage with the management of their Open Space.</p> <p>The Volunteer Improvement Group aims to maintain consistency and improve quality and opportunity through the development of volunteer improvement plans that set 12 aims for continued development.</p> <p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the report and commend volunteers for the work they have achieved. 	

Main Report

Background

1. Volunteers play a vital role in many areas of work in the City of London Open Spaces. Each division, apart from the Cemetery and Crematorium has well-developed volunteering schemes and opportunities.
2. The Volunteer Improvement Group, which comprises representatives of all divisions, works to maintain consistency and improve the quality of volunteering opportunities across the department.

Current Position

3. In 2013-14 the Volunteering Improvement Group focussed on implementing the improvement plans that were developed the previous year.

Measuring volunteering

- Overall a 9.7% increase on the 2012-13 total of volunteer hours was reported for 2013-14. The 2012-13 figure was 1% down on the 2011-12 total of 46,055 hours.
- Nearly all divisions reported an increase in volunteer hours. Of particular note is the City Gardens division which enjoyed an increase of over 2000 hours and Burnham Beeches where the figure was increased by over 1000 hours on the year before.

Table One: total hours volunteered by division during 2012-13 and 2013-14

Site	2012-13	2013-14
Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common	5092	6191
City Commons	10,770	11,402
City Gardens	1127	3207
Epping Forest	21,730	21,186
North London Open Spaces	5182	5831
West Ham Park	1518	1999
Total	45,419	49,816 (up 9.68%)

Volunteer contribution to conservation and site management activities

- Volunteers continued to provide a key role in carrying out fieldwork, particularly surveys. This work has been vital to conservation projects at all Open Spaces.
- A whole site reptile survey was undertaken at Stoke Common with the Friends of Stoke Common and Burnham Beeches volunteers. This involved making up 220-250 reptile refuge sheets in eight survey areas. Volunteer surveyors visited each area and checked the sheets a minimum of seven times from early April to the end of May. This project involved volunteers at every stage from making the sheets to inputting data. In total around 200 volunteer hours were committed to this project.
- At Ashted Common volunteers undertook a project to redesign the site map, rationalise entrances and improve the information given to cyclists and horse riders. This involved surveying all the entrances to ensure the appropriate welcome message was displayed and that layouts were uncluttered and rational. The volunteers wrote-up their findings in a report with a schedule of proposed works. They contributed to the design and installation of the new maps, and re-modelled gates, entrances and signboards to achieve the desired outcome.

9. Resident and community groups including Friends of City Gardens, Barbican Wildlife Group and Petticoat Square Gardening Club are regularly involved in site management and improvement activities including weekly volunteer sessions at Fann Street Wildlife Garden, taking part in gardening days at Christchurch Greyfriars Garden and carrying out plant and wildlife surveys across the City. Corporate volunteers have made a significant contribution to biodiversity enhancements through volunteer days which have included the planting of bulbs, native hedges, wildflower plugs and the creation of log piles for stag beetles and other invertebrates. All these activities make a significant contribution towards the aims and objectives of the City of London Biodiversity Action Plan.
10. At Epping Forest a task run in partnership with The Challenge Network involved 110 people in a conservation task over two days.
11. Southern Forest Keepers at Epping Forest have been working with volunteers at Bush Wood and have helped form a new group called Bush Wood Conservation Volunteers. At the moment they are being led by Forest Keepers, but it is hoped that some of them will attend volunteer task leader training to enable them to take on this responsibility.
12. At North London Open Spaces Heath Hands continue to provide a valuable contribution to habitat management. For example Heath Hands have worked closely with the conservation staff and ecologists to manage the regeneration of Sandy Heath Ride. This project is a great example of integrating volunteer work into the management plan for an area. Further, the volunteers continue to make a significant contribution to the Heath's overall gorse management programme.
13. A public planting day was held at West Ham Park to mark the second anniversary of the formation of the Gardening Club, which aims to show people how to grow vegetables in limited space. Approximately 30 people of all ages got involved. In addition a total of 16 gardening club sessions were held between May and October 2013, compared with seven sessions the previous year.

Volunteer contribution to education and events

14. Volunteers have been engaged in many activities that involved educating people about the Open Spaces.
15. At Burnham Beeches volunteers manned the information point at busy times of the year, providing basic site information and helping with events to encourage greater understanding of the site and its wildlife or just to ensure younger visitors had a specific activity available to get involved with. These have included bird and bug box making days/ witches broomsticks event during week of Halloween themed events. Volunteers also supported family wildlife walks and have led and back-marked numerous guided walks and health walks throughout the last year.
16. At City Commons volunteers were engaged as Volunteer Ambassadors to facilitate an event connected with a project to restore a stand of Small Leaved Lime at Spring Park. The project involved using a heavy horse to extract timber and an event was held to demonstrate this to the public. The

volunteers helped interpret this activity to visitors and explain the City Corporations stewardship of Spring Park.

17. The Friends of City Gardens have continued to help develop learning opportunities for both children and adults by engaging with schools, residents and workers. This has included hosting outdoor learning sessions on tree growth and historic artefacts at Bunhill Fields with over 80 children from The Lyceum School. The Friends and other community volunteers have organised and contributed towards a number of events including the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch, Open Garden Squares Weekend, and the City in Bloom campaign.
18. At Epping Forest the Junior Angling Days, which are run between July and September, have been supported by the Volunteer Fishing Bailiffs. These events have always been well attended by the public. In 2013 the Fishing Bailiffs helped to organise and run three Junior Angling Days.
19. At North London Open Spaces, volunteers helped to develop a new education garden on the North side of Hampstead Heath. The Kenwood Eco-Field was landscaped to include a brand new pond, a story-telling circle for inspiring young minds, a willow maze for getting lost in, a bug hunting area complete with mushroom sculptures for discovering new creatures, magnifying stations to get a closer look and a composting toilet.
20. Hampstead Heath has also seen the start of a new volunteer interpretation programme run by the RSPB as part of the 'Wild About Hampstead Heath' project. Interpretation volunteers have run 305 hours of 'guerrilla' interpretation events on the Heath since this spring and have engaged with 1050 members of the public so far.
21. At West Ham Park approximately 180 primary school children from two local schools helped to sow wildflower seeds to create 1,820 m² of new native wildflower meadow. The Park now has over 7,470 m² of native wildflower meadow, over twice the original amount. In addition, the Friends of West Ham Park have continued to hold their popular annual events and activities; ranging from bat walks in September, biggest leaf pile event in November, the festive Park in the Dark in December, nature guided walks for The RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch in January, and a new event for 2014 - a fully booked stargazing walk in February.

Ensuring the quality of volunteer experience

22. The Volunteer Improvement Plans set objectives for each division under 12 aims:
 - a. Involve volunteers in the management sites
 - b. Dedicate appropriate resources to volunteering
 - c. Develop roles for volunteers
 - d. Recruit volunteers who reflect the diversity of our communities
 - e. Use clear induction procedures
 - f. Provide appropriate training and support
 - g. Reduce risk
 - h. Supervise appropriate to need, experience and ability
 - i. Show appreciation to volunteers
 - j. Monitor performance

- k. Record the impact of volunteering
 - l. Adopt policies and procedures to reflect local need
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- 23. At Burnham Beeches a new job description has been devised for Information Volunteers and a new induction leaflet has been developed. Volunteer leader training has been facilitated and a satisfaction survey for volunteers has been devised.
 - 24. At City Commons additional volunteer leader training has been provided and the Volunteer Tree Warden scheme has been rolled-out across the division. The number of consultation events at which volunteers are represented has been increased.
 - 25. Feedback is gathered from volunteer days to help City Gardens develop and improve the quality of the volunteering activities on offer. To enhance and reward the experience volunteers can join the 'Time Credits' scheme where volunteers can claim credits for each hour they contribute and in return can enjoy various activities across London for free such as rock climbing, swimming and visiting the cinema.
 - 26. At Epping Forest the Volunteer Awards Party in February 2014 celebrated volunteer achievements. Nine gold (for 600 hours), seven silver (300 hours) and seven bronze medals (150 hours) were awarded. Volunteer leadership training has been provided for 12 volunteers, who have now started to lead tasks.
 - 27. At North London Open Spaces the partnership between Hampstead Heath, the RSPB and English Heritage has resulted in a greater variety of volunteer projects. The RSPB has developed robust processes for engaging under-represented groups. Over 20 volunteers have received training.
 - 28. At West Ham Park work has been undertaken on the systems and processes surrounding volunteering, with updates to registration forms, induction procedures and feedback forms.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- 29. Encouraging volunteering contributes to the City Together Strategy to build a strong third sector to meet the needs of our communities.
- 30. The programme also contributes to KPP4 of the Corporate Plan: maximise the opportunities and benefits afforded by our role in supporting London's Communities (support the charitable and voluntary sector).
- 31. Widening and developing volunteering, together with education & biodiversity, is one of the department's three strategic objectives in the Business Plan.

Conclusion

- 32. The introduction of Volunteer Improvement Plans and the oversight of the Volunteer Improvement Group have encouraged the development and expansion of the departments volunteering programme.
- 33. Volunteer contributions increased significantly in 2013-14 to an all time high of 49,800 hours.

34. Volunteering enables members of the local community the opportunity to engage positively with their Open Space, and the department continues to develop new ways to encourage people to volunteer.

Appendices

- None

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