

Committee(s):		Date(s):
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee	For Discussion	3 November 2014
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	For Information	24 November 2014
Subject:		Public
Review of Annual Work Programme 2014		
Report of:		For Discussion
Superintendent of Hampstead Heath		
Summary		
<p>This report provides a review of the Management Operations and activities carried out on Hampstead Heath over the past 12 months as part of the 2014 Annual Work Programme, and considers the new 2015 Annual Work Programme appended to this report.</p>		
Recommendation(s)		
<p>It is recommended that the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee notes the work undertaken during 2014 to enhance the natural aspect and designed landscapes within the Heath, agrees the proposed 2015 Annual Work Plan appended to this report. • That the views of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee are conveyed to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee at their November meeting. 		

Main Report

Background

1. Hampstead Heath is a complex mosaic of different habitats, comprising extensive areas of grassland, secondary woodland, hedgerows, water bodies, streams, a raised bog, heathland and formal areas. It is also extremely popular and well used. All factors that contribute to the complexity of managing the site.
2. Policy 6 of the Interim Management Policy Plan for the Heath states that the City will draw together an annual work plan for the Heath, in consultation with local groups and interested parties. This Annual Work Plan will reflect the primary objective set out in the Mission Statement and will broadly cover planned conservation operations, including vegetation, pond and wetland management, tree work, and footpath maintenance and fencing works.
3. For completeness, the major tasks within the formal areas of the Heath have also been included within the Annual Work Plan.

Review of the 2014 Annual Work Programme

Tree Management

4. The Tree Team has worked through another very busy year, with much of the spring period devoted to tackling the remnants of the St Jude's storm damage. The Team has taken on various large-scale tree dismantling operations, on and around the Heath in addition to their core duties. In June 2014 a key member of the Team moved on to become a Tree Officer in Harrow and the Team has been one person down since then. Happily, the Division has just recruited a high-calibre replacement, so the Team is expected to be back up to full operational capability by Christmas 2014.

Pruning and dismantling work

5. The early part of the spring was occupied by a programme of clearance work associated with the winter storms. Over the spring and summer period, the Team worked on a total of 87 trees, with tasks ranging from dealing with remnant storm damage to safeguarding veteran trees and other more complex operations requiring the use of a hydraulic working platform (figure 2).
6. Due to its reduced operating capacity, the Tree Team has paired up with the Conservation Team on a number of occasions to tackle some of the larger jobs, and this collaborative working has proved very effective.



Figure 1: Crane removing a heavily leaning veteran oak branch, May 2014.

Tree disease and surveying

7. Tree disease is an ever-present threat, and this year has been no exception. Massaria has been a key focus for the Team, both at Hampstead Heath and also at Queen's Park. The Team has continued to remove diseased branches at key London Plane locations, such as South End Green and Parliament Hill.
8. The Tree Management Officer for North London Open Spaces sits on the London Tree Officers Association Working Group on Massaria, putting the Team at the very forefront of understanding and managing this disease.
9. Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) has expanded its territory, despite the efforts of the Forestry Commission's spraying programme in May and June of this year.

OPM was recently found at London Zoo in Regent's Park and is now just over two kilometres from the southern borders of the Heath. Unfortunately it is highly likely that OPM will find its way to the Heath in 2015, so preparations are under way to manage the pest when it arrives.

10. The Tree Team has been very proactive in surveying for signs of OPM on the site and has installed a number of Pheromone traps at various key locations, to establish where the moths are present. So far, 17 male individuals have been caught in the four traps installed on the Heath.

Tree inspections

11. The Team's key role in tree inspection has been increased this year, with all the four members of the Team now qualified as LANTRA Professional Tree Inspectors, including the newly recruited replacement Arborist.
12. The Team has inspected more than 1,600 trees since January 2014, including the tree stock at Queen's Park. Its members have also been able to provide support for the Wood Keeper Team at Highgate Wood on various tree Management Operations and inspection queries.



Figure 2: Retrenching a veteran oak near the Boating Pond, July 2014.

Nature Conservation Work

13. The Conservation Team has had a very successful year, assisted greatly by the very clement summer. The Team had a busy early season, clearing the remnants of the winter storm damage, and progressing to start the cutting and baling operation (figure 3), helped by the fine weather in June. In addition to the Team's Annual Work Programme commitments, its members also managed to find time to carry out some income generating work on the Kenwood Estate, which it is hoped will become a more regular part of their work. More than 1,148 man hours of Heath Hands Volunteers work were supervised by the Conservation section between January 2014 and August 2014, and a series of extended sessions are now planned for October as a pilot project.



Figure 3: Cutting and baling at West Meadow at Kenwood Estate

Tree work and woodland management

14. This work included clearing storm damage from areas where ground conditions had previously prevented access, following the very wet winter. This work absorbed a great deal of the Team's time over the early spring period.
15. Other tasks in this category included:
 - Lifting low limbs across all meadow areas to allow access to cutting machinery.
 - Coppicing in the Orchard site next to Kenwood Nursery Yard. This site has a significant understory of established hazel coppice, which is cut on a prescribed cycle, with the cut hazel being put to variety of uses.
 - Clearing ivy from roadside trees. This is an important maintenance operation that allows roadside trees to be more easily inspected. Ivy growth has been prolific over the last five years, due to the series of wet summers between 2008 and 2010.
 - Removing a number of sycamores at various locations around the site, including the Orchard and the woodland to the south of Spaniard's Road.

Control of invasive species and pest control

16. The Conservation Team has been very actively treating areas of Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed around the Heath, mainly by injecting them with herbicide.
17. The Team has also been engaged in rodent control operations around ponds and yard areas. This year has seen a very noticeable increase in the rat population, probably due to the mild winter of 2013/14.

Grassland Management

18. New wildflower areas have been sown by the Conservation Team on Duke's Field at Parliament Hill, the Heath Extension and also at West Heath, which have proved very popular with the public. This year additional areas were sown with poppy seeds to commemorate the centenary of the First World War.
19. Sward management of principal dam faces is now programmed in to be carried out monthly throughout the growing season, developing a uniform sward on the downstream faces of the principal ponds.
20. The Team also oversees the conservation of ant mounds at West Heath, the Extension and East Heath. This important work to conserve a valuable insect habitat is often carried out by Heath Hands Volunteers.
21. Heath Hands volunteers also support and assist with acid grassland management at the Vale of Health, Sandy Heath and West Heath. The work includes the cyclical management of gorse and controlling the spread of bramble into grassland areas.

Cutting and Baling Operations

22. This summer's operation has been a further improvement on last year's. The Conservation Team has worked through the cutting programme produced earlier this summer and has completed all the areas identified for cutting.
23. The quality of the grass was an improvement on last year and the bales had a lower overall moisture content which enabled the Team to increase the trailer loads to an average of 10 to 12 units.



Figure 4: Cutting and baling near Parliament Hill.

24. The Team aims to improve the product still further, so that the bales can be used as cattle feed rather than just for bedding. The main limiting factor is the presence of ragwort and rank grass species.
25. The new tractor-mounted tedder unit has proved invaluable this season, as it accelerates the drying process while the cut grass is still on the ground. This allows for lighter and drier bale units, which have less tendency to rot when stored.



Figure 5: Loading the bale trailer on the Heath Extension

26. The statistics are impressive, with just over 130 bales taken off the site, which equates to approximately 40 tonnes of material. The Team estimates that they have cut between 14 and 16 hectares, which is a significant increase on last year.
27. The long dry summer which started in June allowed the Team to start the cutting earlier and get a head start, so that the programmed work was nearly completed by the time the weather deteriorated in August.
28. The Conservation Team also generated some additional income for the Division by cutting and baling the West Meadow on the Kenwood Estate in early September.

Progress on The Kenwood Education Garden (KEG) Project

29. This innovative new outdoor classroom facility is now finished and has attracted a great deal of interest and praise. Unfortunately there were no education Team visits this summer but we are confident the site will be used during 2015.
30. New additions installed this year have included a fully functioning composting toilet, a sail canopy to provide shade, a new path, and finishing touches to the nectar bed and pond area
31. There have been a number of Heath Hands Volunteer sessions in the garden over the spring and summer, which have been very well attended. There is now a plan to hand the facility over to the organisation as a project for them to manage themselves.
32. The Team has also carried out renovation work at the Secret Garden and the Lido Educational Garden.



Figure 6: Wildflower meadow at Kenwood Education Garden

Ponds and wetland work

33. Discarded fishing tackle has been removed at all the fishing ponds. This essential work reduces the risk of harm to wildlife, especially to swans and water fowl.
34. To control algae growth at the Whitestone pond, the Conservation Team Supervisor this year trialled use of a widely used vegetable die, which is added to the water and inhibits aquatic plant growth. The trial has been a resounding success, with significantly fewer algal blooms and a greatly reduced requirement to clear algae from the water. Last year staff had to spend up to a day every week removing large quantities of algae and lesser pond weed.
35. The Team also carried out repairs to the water mixing equipment at the Boating Pond, as well as maintenance of fenced reed beds and repairs to floating islands at various ponds. The ponds have had a high level of algal growth this summer, including blue-green blooms that have to be monitored due to their toxicity. The fixed water mixing equipment and the temporary units that can be deployed at short notice are all essential for maintaining optimum oxygen levels for fish health.
36. The Team has just completed coppicing the area between the Bird Bridge and Viaduct Bridge, a riparian area that provides good habitat for birds including water fowl.

Path repairs and other estate work

37. Path repairs have been an important part of the late summer duties of the Team. The Cycle path at the Tumulus Field and sections at the Vale of Health and also Sandy Heath have required surface repairs and rolling, following the dry summer and then sporadic heavy rain.
38. The Team has made good use of the tractor-mounted side arm flail to trim the various road edges around the Heath. This machine is similar to that used by farmers to trim hedgerows but in our case is used as a substitute for strimming,

saving a significant amount of time and reducing the risk of damage to car windscreens and paintwork.

Ecological Work

39. Work on the Ponds Project took up a significant amount of the Ecologists' time this year, and included commenting on the Environmental Impact Statement before it was submitted with the Planning Application in early July. The Team was also heavily involved with the bird surveys in preparation for the Ground Investigation work carried out by the Ponds Project Contractor.

RSPB 'Wild about Hampstead' project

40. Considerable assistance has been provided to the 'Wild About Hampstead Heath Project' led by the RSPB, including leading several guided walks for the volunteers, which were very well received.
41. More than 20 enthusiastic young children were fascinated to see at close hand some of the Heath's grass snakes. Advice was also given to the RSPB Team regarding, among other things, the Heath's wildlife and training providers.

Management Plans

42. Compartment Management Work Plans were completed for Preacher's Hill, the Model Farm and the Secret Garden. A Compartment Management Works Plan for the Fleet Stream will be presented to the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee at their meeting on 3rd November 2014.
43. If the Fleet Stream Compartment Management Work Plan is adopted, there will be 15 working Compartment Management Work Plans in total.
44. Work has begun on preparing a Plan for the Bird Sanctuary.
45. Work will also start this winter on drafting Compartment Management Plans for the ponds impacted by the Ponds Project works, which will then be implemented following completion of the construction work.

Monitoring and Surveying Work

46. The ponds were monitored on a weekly basis. Warnings of potentially hazardous blue-green algae blooms are passed onto the Lifeguards and the Ranger Teams.
47. The Ecology Team carried out regular oxygen monitoring throughout the summer and played a key part in dealing with a serious oxygen crash at Highgate No. 1 Pond in July.
48. The programme of monitoring selected plants and plant communities was completed, except for some areas on the Heath Extension. It is evident from data that cutting, especially carried out just before flowering and repeated over several years, may not eradicate thistle but can substantially reduce its abundance and vigour. This will allow a more targeted approach to be formulated, in order to control but not eradicate this native and ecologically valuable but invasive plant. However, cutting (even several times a season) does not greatly reduce common hogweed, another native but invasive species, although it may help to stop it spreading.



Figure 7: Managing oxygen levels at Highgate One Pond

Working with Volunteers

49. Following training by the Ecology Team, volunteers assisted with and carried out the monitoring of amphibians and grass snakes. A new method of surveying for the presence of stag beetles, developed by Dr Harvey from the University of London, is being trialled. This involves placing devices in the ground, next to suitable decaying wood, which can 'sniff out' chemical signals given off by stag beetle larvae.
50. Equipment was also purchased that helps identify the presence of hedgehogs. It consists of a small triangular waterproof shelter; together with bait and a tray of black ink which are placed inside the shelter, along with sheets of clean paper. Any animals walking through the shelter can be identified by the footprints they leave on the paper sheets. This has revealed that hedgehogs are present in the Bird Sanctuary and Golders Hill Park. Further monitoring locations will be selected on other areas of the Heath.

Formal Areas

51. The Gardening and Sports & Recreation Keeping Teams have had a challenging and creative year, completing the approved projects in the 2014 Annual Work Programme and carrying out routine general maintenance of the formal areas at Parliament Hill Fields, Golders Hill Park, Heath Extension Sports Areas, The Hill Garden & Pergola and Keats House.

Golders Hill Park & The Hill Garden

52. The sustainable planting scheme in the Wall Garden was successfully implemented. The Park Managers and Head Gardener are liaising with representatives of Westminster City Council to share good practice.

53. The Phase Two works at the Stumpery were completed. Further stumps were obtained from Epping Forest, for which we are grateful (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Stumps from Epping Forest

Parliament Hill Fields

54. This year saw the successful completion of Phase Two of the landscape works at the Bull Path, including the installation of bicycle stands, creation of a heritage orchard, removal of hedge rows and the formation of longer grass meadow areas.
55. Hedgerow reduction was carried out around the Bowling Green and Highgate Road to improve hedge vigour and sightlines, while existing hedgerows were gapped up with native species to broaden diversity. A drip-line irrigation system was also installed.
56. Shrub borders in the Bowling Green were replanted with native planting to encourage all-year-round interest.
57. Grass renovation works were carried out following National Grid works to repair leaking gas pipes and a wild meadow area created at the education centre garden by the Lido.

Sports Facilities and Filming Events

58. Despite the wet winter and hot summer, the Sports & Recreation Keeping Team managed all the winter and summer sports grass pitches to a high standard.
59. The Team also handled up to 15 separate school sports sessions per week from April through to July, including sports days and Camden Schools Sports Association events.
60. The Team was responsible for overseeing 20 separate film location shoots, ensuring the Heath landscape was protected at all times.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

61. The preparation and implementation of an Annual Work Plan in accordance with Policy 6 of the Interim Management Plan contributes to the strategic theme of *A Clean, Pleasant and Attractive City*. Its natural aspect is a significant factor in the popularity of the Heath for general recreation and sport, which also helps contribute towards *A Healthy City*.
62. The actions for the new Annual Work Plan are set out under the main character areas of the Heath. This follows the format of the proposed Part III section of the Management Plan, detailed prescriptions of work. What is ultimately required for each of these character areas is a clear vision on the long-term aspirations for them, together with those policies that are relevant to these areas, which will be taken from the Part I overriding strategic direction and Part II policies for each Topic Area.

Implications

63. The costs of meeting this ambitious programme are funded through the Superintendent's local risk budget. Wherever possible, opportunities will be sought for external funding to support these essential works, while the Management Team will continue to promote and develop opportunities for volunteers.

Conclusion

64. The Heath is a complex site and it is impossible to set out in full all the work required to manage it a year ahead. Unanticipated circumstances (for example, storms) may require a change of priorities. However, the Plan establishes our intentions for the year, subject to the Committee's comments.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Annual Work Programme for 2015