

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group	13 June 2012
Subject: Superintendent's Update – Queen's Park	Public
Report of: Simon Lee – Superintendent Hampstead Heath	For Discussion
<p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>This report provides an update to members of the Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group on management and operational activities in Queen's Park since the last meeting in November 2011.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>That the views of the Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group be received.</p>	

Main Report

Background

1. Progress continues to be made on a number of key projects and initiatives in Queen's Park. A number of events have been planned for 2012, which include community organised events and an entertainments and educational play programme arranged by the City of London. Planning is in progress as part of a Wellbeing Festival of events in the Park. The Wellbeing Festival is a campaign to encourage, engage and inspire communities to use open spaces for positive recreation to enhance health and wellbeing.
2. Queen's Park continues to attract a diverse audience with just over a million visits between April 2011 and March 2012. The Children's Farm received 170,000 and the Play Area 235,000 visits. This report sets out the continued work which is being carried out to ensure the park remains one of the City of London's premier open spaces.

Ecology

3. The new sustainable planting scheme in the Quiet Garden is complete. The scheme has seen an increase in the use of perennial planting with retention of some seasonal bedding, providing an all year round display that still maintains colour and interest. Due to budgetary reductions the dimensions of some of the beds in the garden have been reduced. This work was undertaken as part of identified efficiency savings.



New perennial planting in the Quiet Garden

4. There are currently three primary bee hives with four smaller hives in the Quiet Garden. As a result of the damp start to the spring, bee keepers in the area have struggled to make progress with their hives, especially with queen bees not laying eggs. The bee keeper is using the smaller hives for artificial insemination of the queen bee. The attending bee keeper will be present at an Open Garden's and Studios event on 17 June 2012.
5. The larger bund at the southern end of the park is seeing some success with wildflowers this year. The Park Manager is discussing a wild flower project for winter of 2012 with the support of the Hampstead Heath ecologist to try and re-establish wild flowers on some of the bunds next spring.
6. Transition Kensal to Kilburn a Transition Towns project grows from strength to strength with regular attendance at weekends and ad-hoc visits to water plants in the week. The group recently held a seed swap in the park. A privet hedge was removed between the raised beds and a bed at the rear of the café allowing the group more room to grow. The removal of this hedge has improved the vista from the rear of the café up to the bandstand.

Sport and Recreation

7. City of London tennis courses are being held between May – August and continue to be popular. Darryl Williams, the tennis coach, continues to provide half term tennis camps for children in the area and these are well attended.
8. Queen's Park has been asked to support the Ping London event in July 2012. Having access to two ping pong tables has proved very popular, with

both tables in regular use. During the winter period the tables were located on tennis court number six; this had no impact on the provision of tennis courts for other users. Both tables have been moved back to the area in front of the courts. Some special events and competitions are planned on the tables during the month of July.

9. Requests are being received from local schools to use the park as a facility to hold their annual sports day events. The park has become a popular location for schools for their formal organised sports activities. Salusbury school children also participate in cross country training once a week in the park.
10. Work will commence on the implementation of Phase 1A of the masterplan playground refurbishment in late May 2012, with three new items of equipment being installed. A Cable Runway, Timberwood Tangle and Pyramid Tower. It is planned to have this area re-opened by the summer holidays.
11. In November 2011 and May 2012, four sessions were held over weekends to engage with the local community and seek continued support for the development of the Play Area. The sessions were staffed by members of Queen's Park Area Residents Association (QPARA) and the Park Manager. Nearly 100 names have been gathered from members of the public who have expressed an interest in either following the development or providing some time to the project either through manual volunteering work or assisting with much needed fundraising ideas and initiatives. A meeting of the fund raising group is scheduled for the 16 June 2012 in the park.
12. A Book Festival was organised by the QPARA in May 2012, the event took place over a weekend on the 19/20 May 2012. It is estimated that 600 people attended the event over the weekend; this included 100 children who had access to free sessions over the two days. Support was given by City of London staff to help set up and strike down marquees and move seating and tables. Additional toilets for the event were also provided from Hampstead Heath.
13. The 2 June 2012 will host a celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and 125 years of Queen's Park being under the management of the City of London Corporation. A family picnic, along with music, children's rides and an evening outdoor showing of the King's Speech has been organised with the support of the Lexi Cinema. Visitors are also being encouraged to bring along a dessert to share. This is a free event apart from the children's rides where a cost will apply to go on the rides.
14. QPARA have organised an Open Garden and Studios event on 17 June 2012, the park will feature at this event with our gardener, Ian Walker,

being available during the day along with the bee keeper, who manages the hives in the Quiet Garden. Musical entertainment will be provided on the bandstand as people pass from garden to studio in the Queen's Park area.

15. Musical entertainment on the bandstand will take place in June, July and August on alternate weekends. other weekend. This was suggested by one of the QPARA representatives who thought it would encourage more people to visit the park in the warmer months on a Sunday afternoon.
16. The café will provide musical entertainment on Friday evenings over the summer months.
17. This year, Queen's Park day will take place on 16 September 2012. This community event is organised by volunteers from QPARA with support from City of London staff setting up and facilitating this popular annual attraction. Previous years has seen up to 14,000 people attend on the day.
18. The Lexi Cinema's sister company, *Where is the Nomad*, will be holding three outdoor screenings in August and September 2012. These will be; 18 August 2012 – *The Goonies*, 8 September 2012 – *The Graduate* and 22 September 2012 – *The Big Lebowski*.
19. Six new battery hens have joined the farm in the last 6 months; their introduction to the farm has seen them change into lovely, healthy chickens. Visitors to the farm have been able to see this positive change. Unfortunately earlier this year one of the goats, Milo, had a blocked urethra and had to attend the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) in Potters Bar to undergo emergency surgery. He spent ten days in the RVC recovering from his operation and is now back up to full health.

Conservation and Heritage

20. A consultant has been appointed to support the production of Conservation Management Plan (CMP) project. The initial stage of the CMP will be for the City of London, with the consultant, to ensure stakeholders are included in the development of the plan, through a programme of involvement and consultation. Queen's Park CMP Working Group will be formed of City of London Managers, tree experts, ecologists, local residents associations and other local groups to guide the preparation of the CMP.
21. A Conservation Management Plan will enable the significance of the sites heritage to be better understood, providing a framework for all future improvements. Work in our other open spaces has proved very valuable in understanding the history of the site and setting the context for future developments. A CMP is an integral component of many external funding applications.

Landscape Management

22. A tree survey at Queen's Park was carried out this year by ACS Consulting in April 2012. As a result of the inspection, there are a number of trees that have been identified for dead wooding, crown thinning, crown reduction and 4/5 for removal. The Arboricultural Supervisor will be carrying out a walk with the Contractor over of the listed trees shortly and will prioritise the required works. The resulting work specifications will be forwarded to the relevant officer within the Brent Planning Department and carried out by the specialist arboricultural team within the Division.
23. The beech hedge adjacent to the Children's Farm has been reduced in height as has the bay tree outside the café and some thinning of the Photinia in the sensory garden has also taken place.
24. Winter maintenance works have been carried out to the Pitch and Putt course, this included maintenance of the greens and fairways. The course remained open throughout the winter period with temporary greens in place. New tee off mats were purchased and have been installed.
25. The main field in the park was seeded in spring 2012. In September 2012 we have arranged for the field to be slit to improve drainage. This process will also aerate the soil and improve grass growth. The reason that aeration is carried out is to let air and water into the soil profile as this helps relieve compaction.

Management

26. As part of the City Surveyors 20 Year Building Repairs and Maintenance Plan work has been undertaken on the barn in the staff yard; this involved the replacement of side cladding and roof. This has made a significant improvement to this much needed storage space for machinery and equipment.
27. Other works to be carried out to buildings and infrastructure in 2012/13 include external decoration to buildings in the staff yard.
28. Some minor works have been carried out to the ramp outside the play area toilets and repairs to the surface in the staff yard where vehicular movement had broken up the concrete surface making it a hazard.
29. There has been one reported accident since November 2011. A member of staff, whilst working in the Children's Farm, turned and hit his knee against a fence panel causing him to be off work for a short period. An internal Health and Safety Audit is due to be undertaken next month as part of the Open Spaces health and safety policy and feedback on this will be given in the November 2012 update.

30. In the financial year 2012/13 the park will see the loss of the resources to fund the Apprentice Gardener post as part of the efficiency reductions. The apprentice was successful in an application for a gardening post at West Ham Park. This vacancy has been temporarily filled with a member of staff on a fixed term contract. In March 2014 another full time equivalent post will be deleted from the Queen's Park team. Due to a member of staff being re-assigned to another area within the Division a vacant post is currently being filled with a fixed term contract. From April 2014 onwards the team will operate with eight full time members of staff. This will present some operational challenges in terms of managing the breadth of facilities within the park.
31. The process of reviewing the structure and work pattern of staff as a result of these reductions has commenced. This will be an opportunity to ensure the rota and jobs meets the needs of the business. Consultation will take place over the next few months with regard to any new structure for managing the site.
32. The park has been approached by a number of schools in the area with regard to work experience sessions. Three pupils will attend the park for one week each in the month of July 2012.

Temporary Hosepipe Ban

33. With a recent hosepipe ban being introduced in the South East a number of rain water butts have been installed in the staff yard. The Transition Town group already make use of a butt next to the café which Toby Brown, Café lease holder, allowed them to install on one of the down pipes. We are also making use of the grey water irrigation system on the planting and bedding scheme in the Quiet Garden and on the Pitch and Putt course.
34. Recent exemption has been given by Thames Water to allow new plantings to be watered in for a 28 day period.

Visitor and Community

35. When on litter patrol Keepers wear hi-visibility vests, making them more visible to users. Staff will enforce breaches of byelaws should they be witness it occurring. Although dogs not on leads and cyclists continue to be an issue, this is addressed daily by park staff. As the park now has access to a branded gazebo it is an ideal opportunity to hold road shows allowing park staff to engage, give educational advice to those users who choose to ignore byelaws or who may be ignorant to the implications that there actions are having on other park users.
36. In August 2012, the Hampstead Heath Education Team will be attending the park and deliver four free family events. These events are well attended

and were very well received by the public in the feedback and comment given during 2011. The events include: Wild and Wacky Olympics – August 6th 2012, Wild Play Day – August 13th 2012, Brilliant Bugs & Butterflies – August 20th 2012, and Para Nature Challenge August 27th 2012. All the events will be designed to be interactive and participatory, with a nature theme, to engage families in learning about open spaces in hands-on manner. The events will run from 12noon until 4pm.

37. The Salusbury School approached the Park Manager and requested use of the park during the school day as part of their Science Week. Three sessions with thirty children in each group were held, the sessions included an introduction to the park and the children were asked to go and identify ten trees which were marked with numbers. To aid them in their quest of identification, they were given pictures of the ten trees and leaves.
38. Local schools, which include Malorees, Kensal Rise School, Hop Scotch Nursery, Islamia School and Salusbury School, have made formal visits to the farm. On average, thirty pupils attend these visits. We have recorded 20 visits in 2011/12. They are given an insight in to the types of animals which we have in the Farm and what is involved in looking after them.
39. Income continues to be generated from the hire of the Bandstand. We now offer a morning and afternoon session at weekends and have already received ten bookings for 2012. We currently charge £55 per session.

Queen's Park Café

40. There have been a number of issues raised within the local community recently with regard to the café and the decision by the Hampstead Heath, Queen's Park and Highgate Wood Management Committee's to renegotiate the café lease with the current tenant.
41. The City's independent catering consultants who provide advice to other park cafes across England, including high profile sites within the Royal Parks, believe that the cafe is delivering a good service to the majority of customers. Their research, conducted over two years, included market research, independent mystery shopping visits and audits of operational service. A total of 181 interviews were conducted. A summary of their findings is appended to this report.
42. Overall 76% rated their experience as "excellent" or "good" with 21% rating it as "average". However, only 37% rated value for money as "excellent" or "good", although 53% rated it as "average". Only a very small minority rated the overall experience and value for money as poor or very poor, (3% and 10% respectively).

43. 89% of the respondents were aware of the café and 76% of respondents had used the café. A quarter of respondents visit the café at least once a week, suggesting a high level of repeat business and satisfaction levels.
44. The reasons given for non-use (bring own food to park, never been to park before, live nearby so eat at home, just come to park, never there that long) suggest that very little custom is being lost because of problems with the café itself.
45. During 2010 a series of mystery diner reports were commissioned by the City of London covering four café operations, Queens Park Café, Golders Hill Café, Parliament Hill Café and Highgate Woods. These were conducted in July, August and November. The average overall score achieved by Queen's Park Café over the three mystery diners was 71.3%, second only to Golders Hill Park Café, which achieved a score of 75.7%.
46. The business at Queen's Park is managed alongside the Highgate Woods Café with economies of scale achieved across the two businesses. Both tenancies are due to expire in October 2012. Between 1992 and 2001, five tenants occupied the Queen's Park café premises with varying degrees of success. Some businesses went bankrupt whilst others operated at a loss.
47. It is important to recognise that there are very different challenges in managing a café in a park, to managing a café on a busy High Street. The business turnover is influenced not only by the daily change in footfall and weather conditions, but also the seasonality of operating within the confines of daylight hours. During his period of operating the cafe at Queen's Park the current tenant's turnover has improved year on year and the site contributes significantly to supporting the park services.
48. The City Corporation commits over £650,000 per year from its own resources towards the upkeep of Queen's Park, at no cost to the local taxpayer. With the City's own income under increasing pressure, it is vital that income streams are maximized to offset expenditure. Without the income from the café, the City would have to consider making some very difficult decisions about which services could no longer be supported. Just to put the income generated from the café into perspective - it supports the Animal Attendant position managing the Pets Corner or provides staffing to ensure the paddling pool can open. The City has no desire to reduce the standards of service within the park, but it is not possible to operate on a deficit budget year on year.
49. The City took the decision to negotiate the lease with the current tenant based on a wealth of independent professional information collected over a significant period of time. Whilst there are areas where service can be improved, overall the café is seen to be providing a good service to the majority of customers.

Representation on the Joint Consultative Group

50. Over the past few years a number of attempts have been made to extend representation on the Queen's Park Joint Consultative Group. At present the body consists of the following representatives:

- Chairman and Deputy Chairman of Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee
- three members of Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee
- 2 Brent Council nominees
- 2 Queen's Park Area Residents' Association representatives
- 1 representing local schools
- 1 representing Ismalia School

TOTAL 11

51. Following a review of the current representation it has been suggested that the Group be extended with representation from other local groups including:

- One or more from other local Residents' Association, including:
 - Aylestone Park Residents and Tenants Association (APRATA),
 - Kensal Triangle Residents' Association,
 - Brondesbury Residents' and Tenants.
- A representative of sporting/recreation bodies using Queen's Park.

52. The committee's views on any other local community group representation would be welcomed.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

53. The management and provision of Queen's Park provides a vital retreat, enabling people to escape the daily pressures of living and working in London. The park fulfils many of the themes within the City's Community Strategy, but specifically providing "A Clean, Pleasant and attractive City", "A Healthy City" and "A Vibrant and Culturally Rich City".

54. It will also help fulfil the Department's Strategic Goals and Objectives 2 (To adopt sustainable and sensitive working practices, promote biodiversity and protect the Open Spaces for the enjoyment of future generations) and 5 (To ensure that the profile of the Open Spaces is further recognised through working in partnership with others to promote our sites and through influencing policies at a local, regional and national level).

Implications

55. There are no financial implications arising from this report, the operational requirements highlighted in the report will be met from the Superintendents' local risk budget.
56. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Conclusion

57. It is acknowledged that Queen's Park continues to be a popular open space within the community, serving a wide and diverse audience. The staff that work in the park take great pride in the service they provide to the community and are actively engaged in a number of initiatives to ensure that the management of the site is sustainable and operates within the financial limits set down by the City Corporation.
58. The City of London Open Spaces Department, Queen's Park and its staff continue to provide a range of high quality facilities and attractions for visitors to enjoy.

Background Papers:

Update on proposals for refurbishment of Queen's Park Play Area – June 2011
Update Queen's Park Conservation Management Plan – June 2011

Contact:

Richard Gentry / richard.gentry@cityoflondon.gov.uk / 020 8969 561

Appendix 1 - Feedback from the Market Research

The aspects most liked were:

- Location 36%
- Convenience 16%
- Sit outside 13%
- Friendly Staff 9%
- Child Friendly 8%
- Ice Cream Quality 8%
- Good Food 7%

The aspects least liked were:

- Nothing 27%
- Toilets 20%
- Too Expensive 16%
- Queues 7%
- Lack of Choice on the Menu 6%
- Food Quality 6%

Over 64% of respondents who had used the café said they would like to see improvements as follows:

- More/Cleaner Toilet Facilities 53%
- Wider Variety of Food 15%
- Better Quality of Food 14%
- Lower Prices 9%
- Speed of Service/More Staff 8%

Toilet and their maintenance fall outside of the cafes responsibility. Since this research the City has increased toilet provision at the café.