

Committee(s)	Dated:
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee - For Information	9 March 2015
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee - For Decision	23 March 2015
Subject: Landscape improvement works at Parliament Hill (Kite Hill), Hampstead Heath	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Information

Summary

This report informs Members on the proposed landscape and infrastructure improvement works at Parliament Hill, also known as Kite Hill. The site has an iconic status with panoramic views across London and is popular visitor attraction on bonfire night, New Year Eve, summer evenings and weekends. Due to heavy footfall Parliament Hill suffers greatly from wear and tear, becoming very muddy in winter and baking hard and compact in the summer with little grass cover. The intended works will be undertaken by the multi-skilled in-house teams from across the North London Open Spaces as part of the ongoing annual work programme. The scheme will maintain the important strategic views, simplify the bench layout, improve drainage and restore a grass sward, therefore improving the natural landscape and visitor experience.

Recommendation(s)

- That the Members of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee Members note the proposals to improve the landscaping and infrastructure works at Parliament Hill.
- That the views of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee are conveyed to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee at their meeting on 23 March 2015.
- That the Members of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee support the proposals to carrying out the works at Parliament Hill as part on the on-going Annual Works Programme.

Main Report

Background

1. Parliament Hill (also known as Kite Hill) forms part of the prominent ridge traversing West Hampstead to Highgate. It is an open area of Hampstead Heath 98 meters above sea level consisting of grassland, hedgerows, woodland, scrubland and seating areas.

2. There are a number of outlooks on Parliament Hill, with some of the best panoramic views from the summit towards the City of London, St Paul's Cathedral and the Victoria Tower of the Palace of Westminster (London View Management Framework – Mayor of London, March 2012). Hampstead Heath has a statutory duty to maintain two strategic views.

Current Position

3. Parliament Hill is one of London's 'mustering points' where members of the public converge to celebrate, remember and contemplate. It is an Open Space 24/7 and during important calendar dates, such as Bonfire Night and News Year's Eve, can attract crowds of up to 6,000 people. On summer evening and at weekends the site is popular for kite flying and family picnickers.
4. The impact of the heavy footfall at Parliament Hill has resulted in verges of pathways, informal paths, desire line, large areas around the summit and under wooden benches being deeply compacted, eroded, bare of grass cover and often extremely muddy in winter times. Areas are on a par with cattle 'poaching' in a farm gateway (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Highest point of Parliament Hill - eroded and deeply compacted

5. It is accepted that the solutions to heavy use and resulting wear and tear is not to introduce hardwearing and usually visually jarring infrastructure, but to respond to such wear in a way that is sensitive to the rural and natural aspect of Hampstead Heath, for this reason it is intended to adopt the following seven principles:
 - Maintain the countryside appearance of Hampstead Heath at Parliament Hill.
 - Recognise the iconic significance of Parliament Hill as a destination in London.

- Accept that the site will be heavily used throughout the year irrespective of weather and time of day.
- Provide some *hard infrastructure* (benches, etc.) but let the site and its views dominate.
- Consider providing temporary infrastructure on known busy occasions - eg.: provide additional temporary litter bins on bonfire night.
- Strategic view cones need to be managed so that they are not obscured by tree bramble and scrub growth.
- Establish a long term *maintenance regime* as part of the ongoing Annual Work Programme to address deep compaction, erosion and vegetation management accepting large areas will have to be temporary stock fenced off on a rotational basis to allow for grass recovery and establishment.

Proposals

6. Advice was sought from a Landscape Architect (Appendix 1 & 2) in consultation with key conservation staff on how best to plan and undertake the improvement works.
7. The following works are proposed and will form part of the ongoing Annual Work Programme. Photographs of the area taken in January 2015 are appended at the end of the report (Appendix 3):
 - Relocate litter bin away from the crest of the Hill (Figure 2, Appendix 3) and provide a second litter bin at 1B, these locations will be supplemented with additional temporary bins during events. Timber cladding will be fixed to the outside of the bins to soften the hard concrete appearance - cladding is currently being trialled on several locations across Hampstead Heath.
 - Move existing stainless steel interpretation sign (Figure 3, Appendix 3) so it does not coincide with the crossing of the two main path routes, and provide a cobble base surface.
 - It is proposed a new sign comprising of a photograph with key landmarks identified is also prepared. This will initially be made of QR code for smart phones to read – the location of the second sign is still to be identified.
 - On a rotation, undertake grass renovation works, while areas are temporarily fenced off using stock fencing, including breaking up deep compaction, making up soil levels, seed sowing and post grass sward maintenance (Figure 4, Appendix 3).¹

¹ Benches will have to be temporarily removed to allow the works to be undertaken by tractor attached implements. Work has commenced to identify the families and/or friends connected to the benches with dedications. New benches will be installed where the existing benches are beyond economic repair.

- Ensure the view cone zone is free of benches and vegetation.
 - Review the layout of benches next to path but away from crest and position looking toward Highgate and St Paul's Cathedral. A maximum of fifteen permanent benches will be allowed on site. All benches will have a grass enforcement installed to assist with preventing wear and tear at the base.
8. It is intended that the works will be carried out by the Hampstead Heath in-house multi-skilled staff, including the Ecologist, Arboriculture, Conservation, Rangering, Keeping and Technical Maintenance Teams.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

9. The works supports the City of London Corporate Plan 2013-17 – KPP5 *“increasing the impact of the City cultural and heritage offer on the life of London and the nation”*.
10. The design supports the three overriding policies and/or essential actions in the Hampstead Heath Management Plan Part 1 – Towards a Plan for the Heath 2007-2017:-

D1 - “Conserve and enhance the historic and planned elements of the Heath’s designed landscapes, while improving their appearance and public facilities”.

H6 “Maintain existing views and consider the restoration of lost views where appropriate”.

NL3 “Manage the Heath’s grasslands to enhance their nature conservation and aesthetic value”.

Implications

11. It is estimated that the costs are already funded within the Annual Work Programme and will be met from the Superintendent's Local Risk Budget. Additional costs will relate to the hire of a subsoiler, an estimated cost of £100 per day has been allowed for.
12. A number of donors have come forward offering to pay towards the cost of new signage and this is currently being followed up on.
13. There is a risk of public concern over the vegetation management, particularly the felling of trees to maintain views and fencing off of large sections of the Parliament Hill summit.
14. A combination of temporary on-site notices will be used to keep the public informed about the intended works. In addition the Communication and Information Officer will keep visitors informed via e-newsletters and the website.

15. It is intended to introduce the design concepts to Members of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee during their walk on 7 March 2015.

16. There are no legal or property implications.

Conclusions

17. The works will improve ambience and natural landscape of the Parliament Hill site resulting in a better visitor experience.

18. Key conservation staff and an external Landscape Architect have contributed to the natural design and Multi-Skilled Teams from across Hampstead Heath will be involved in completing the works as part of the on-going Annual Work Programme.

19. Parliament Hill is one of London's iconic view points and is popular with Londoners, the Nation and tourists.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Landscape Management Principles
- Appendix 2 - Bench Location Plan
- Appendix 3 - Photographs taken January 2015

Additional Information

London View Management Framework (March 2012) - high-res files

<https://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/supplementary-planning-guidance/view-management/london-view-management-framework-march-2012-high-res-files>

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