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| Committee(s): | Date(s): |
| Open Spaces, City Gardens and West Ham Park Committee | 11 June 2012 |
| Subject: Annual Review of Volunteer Working on the Open Spaces | Public |
| Report of: Director of Open Spaces | For Information |
| <p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>In the last year many volunteers who live near our Open Spaces have continued to carry out a wide range of tasks that have supported the Superintendents in managing their areas. During this period the overall number of volunteer hours has increased and has been of immense benefit in maintaining each area. This report summarises the extent of the work carried out by volunteers across all of the City's Open Spaces in 2011/12, which amounted to over 46,000 hours worked from all sources, an increase of 1,132 hours on the previous year.</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>That this report is received and the invaluable work carried out by volunteers across all of the City's Open Spaces is acknowledged.</p> | |

Main Report

Background

1. The range of work carried out by volunteers has been a significant factor in maintaining the City's Open Spaces for a number of years. Volunteer groups are now established at all our main sites and in the past year have contributed a total of over 46,000 hours work from all sources, for which we are extremely grateful.

Current Position

2. The Open Spaces Department has established a Volunteer Improvement Group to co-ordinate and promote volunteer work. The group has developed a Volunteer Strategy, a copy of which is appended to this report.

The strategy sets overarching principles under which each division can develop its own policy on volunteering. In producing this strategy the group made reference to the work of a number of organisations that work in this field, including the UK Volunteering Forum (Investing in Volunteers), London Parks and Green Space Forum and Greater London Volunteering. The document is therefore consistent with regional and national guidelines.

3. Each Superintendent has summarised his volunteering activities in the last year, as follows:

Epping Forest

4. The Epping Forest Division recruited people to 36 new volunteer roles, which is an increase of 19.5% on 2010/11.
5. The volunteers directly managed by the City of London (at Epping Forest and the London Metropolitan Archives) have completed 8,543 volunteer hours.
6. The Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT) completed 6,415 volunteer hours in 2011/12 and the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV) 4,578 hours.
7. In 2011, Epping Forest ran an event with Orange RockCorps for the first time. Orange RockCorps is a charity that encourages young people to give their time to others and in return they can earn themselves a ticket to a concert organised by Orange RockCorps. Over 30 teenagers cut back burnt gorse on Leyton Flats, with the assistance of arborist staff who chipped and removed the gorse.
8. The Community Liaison Officer and Volunteer Development (VDO) set up Epping Forest's first project with The Challenge Network, a charity that empowers young people to work within their community. Last year they helped clear hawthorn and blackthorn as part of Project Nightingale. The task was run over two days where 80 young people aged 15 to 16 came and helped.
9. The VDO continues working with the Youth Reparation Service around Hollow Ponds. This year the group have expanded their work programme to include other areas of the Forest and working with the community. 24 work days were completed in 2011, with an average of 12 young offenders attending each work day for two and a half hours, completing 720 hours. These figures are not included in the volunteer hours, as it is compulsory for them to participate.

10. In 2011 the annual Scout Project was organised by the VDO in conjunction with the EFCT. The Scouts undertook a total of four projects consisting of two conservation tasks, clearing silver birch and gorse, one pond task, clearing Phragmites from Bulrush Pond and a construction task. The construction task was to weave willow spilling in front of previously installed geotextile revetments at the Eagle Pond to naturalise and stabilise the revetment. The events were a great success and enjoyed by all involved.
11. The Lakes and Ponds Task Force continue with the improvements to Hollow Pond, Eagle Pond and Connaught Water, creating new disabled angling swims and planting marginal and aquatic plants.
12. The Volunteer Awards Party in January 2011 in the newly refurbished Butler's Retreat was a great success. Five gold (for 600 hours), 19 silver (300 hours) and six bronze medals (150 hours) were awarded. The event was photographed by Volunteer Photographer, Bob Good.
13. Volunteer, Alan Sibley, has been a Volunteer Fishing Bailiff on the Forest for more than 10 years. Last year he became a Freeman of the City in recognition of over 10,000 hours of service.
14. The training of volunteers and staff has continued, with both staff and volunteers receiving joint training in first aid, visitor surveys, leading health walks and the safe use of brush cutters.

Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common

15. During 2011/12 volunteers contributed 6,200 hours of work at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common. Yet again volunteers have been an important part of nearly every aspect of work at the reserves. In addition to the weekly Thursday and monthly practical tasks, at both sites, there is now a weekly Tuesday ecological group boosting activity in this area of work. Tasks have therefore ranged from the usual habitat and practical works and staffing the information unit, to leading and back marking guided walks, supporting community events (bird box building and Easter trails), to a juniper survey, fixed point photos and bird, reptile, butterfly and bat monitoring - but in reality the list is virtually endless.
16. Corporate groups were again involved with work at Stoke Common where Honda, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Timberland and Computer Associates all got involved. However, the number of volunteers attending these events was less the previous year, resulting in a lower overall volunteer figure.
17. Around 15% of all work carried out was by under 18's, including school work experience placements and one college placement over the year. Local school conservation groups also attended on ten occasions during the

winter period and there were monthly visits from Cub, Scout and Guide groups.

18. The Landlink and Acorn groups for people with special needs also attended on a monthly basis though for Landlink this is the last year this group will be visiting. After 15 years of helping us at the Beeches the group has changed how it is to be run and they are unable to visit us after March 2012.
19. The Friends of Stoke Common have continued to develop and events ranged from a bat and moth evening in the summer to the winter staple of heathland restoration and birch clearance. Their monthly meetings are averaging over twenty volunteers per outing and the construction of the birch Christmas tree was a particular highlight. This year also saw the group successfully fundraising through Christmas cards and donations to self fund their activity throughout the year.
20. Overall volunteers cleared 3ha of birch and other scrub at stoke common, cut the remaining pockets of rhododendron from the Beeches, cleared litter, repaired paths, built a bridge, staffed the information point, repaired fencing, assisted with general site maintenance and carried out a very varied range of ecological work. Eyes and ears volunteers also helped with spotting issues on the reserves and clearing litter.

City Commons

21. Volunteers contributed a total of 11,230 hours during 2011/12. This was on the back of a divisional Key Project to promote volunteering across the Commons. In addition to this, volunteer archaeologists from the Surrey Archaeological Society contributed a further 1,000 hours to the Ashted Common Roman Villa Project.
22. The Division runs six directly managed practical volunteer groups across its seven open spaces. Ashted Common provides a weekly opportunity for practical volunteering and here numbers have increased by 32%, so that group size is now regularly over 20. The biggest single increase was at Riddlesdown, where numbers went up by 76%. To support this increase extra leadership and supervisory capacity has been achieved by training some of the volunteers as group leaders.
23. The Volunteer Working Group has taken a further step forward in its development and now includes volunteer representatives to assist in its aim of implementing the division's Volunteer Policy. This policy seeks to

ensure that a range of diverse and interesting volunteer opportunities are offered to a consistently high quality standard across the seven Commons.

24. A number of volunteers across the Commons have been trained to conduct visitor surveys and they have been conducting these over the course of the year.
25. Volunteers continue to be involved in activities such as livestock checking and wildlife surveys.
26. The City Commons division supports the Friends of Farthing Downs and Kenley Airfield Friends Group to enhance appreciation and awareness of Farthing Downs and Kenley Common respectively. The division continues to support the Lower Mole and Downlands Countryside Management Projects and The Conservation Volunteers to promote local volunteering.

North London Open Spaces (NLOS)

27. Volunteers are an essential component of the management of our sites and the engagement of our visitors and communities. In 2011/12, volunteers across our sites contributed 6,459 hours of practical conservation work, species monitoring, people engagement and other expertise. In 2011/12, as a result of the generous funding provided by the City Bridge Trust, NLOS has put a focus on training and developing volunteers in specific areas of conservation. NLOS continues to work closely with our main volunteer partner organisation, Heath Hands, to deliver these remarkable achievements.
28. NLOS is committed to ensuring that volunteers have exceptional, informative and worthwhile experiences. As a result, and through the generous funding from the City Bridge Trust, various opportunities were highlighted and developed to provide volunteers with training and expertise in conservation tasks. In particular, volunteers were trained on species monitoring techniques to assist with a variety of projects including grass snake monitoring, amphibian monitoring and crayfish trapping. For example, 3 volunteers engage in weekly crayfish trapping on the Heath to protect natural aquatic fauna from these invasive species. Another 12 volunteers are now trained to monitor grass snakes along various transects across the Heath. The benefit of the focus on training is many-fold: providing us with essential information regarding the ecology of the Heath; giving back to our community by sharing our own expertise and knowledge; engaging our volunteers and augmenting the volunteer experience; and promoting the importance of the Open Spaces to a wider audience.

29. Heath Hands continues to contribute significantly to the work on Hampstead Heath and other NLOS sites, contributing 4984 hours of volunteering. As well as general, and invaluable, habitat management work, Heath Hands have been instrumental in various other self-contained projects. Heath Hands have continued to focus on their project to increase gorse on the Heath, which is a species of shrub that provides valuable habitat for other wildlife. Heath Hands volunteers have also contributed to the aesthetic of the popular Ladies Pond facility by running regular gardening sessions supported by the City Bridge Trust. They have also assisted in the planting and management of the Pergola and Hill Garden, Athlone House, Keats House gardens and Highgate Wood.
30. Heath Hands are an integral part of the smooth running of Hampstead Heath. The contribution of Heath Hands is often through regular habitat management and gardening, and can go unnoticed by the general public when visiting the Heath. However, this work is essential in providing a first class open space for the public to enjoy.
31. Heath Hands volunteers also act as fantastic ambassadors of the Heath to our local communities through their passion and enthusiasm for the Heath and its wildlife. As a result, they are increasingly involved in our various festivals and people engagement activities including the Hampstead Heath Heritage Festival and Conker Championships, Highgate Wood Heritage Day, and Golders Hill Park Butterfly House. This year, Heath Hands also helped the Hampstead Heath Education team deliver very successful Eco-Art workshops at the Affordable Art Fair. They were also instrumental in selling our popular Hampstead Heath calendar. Beyond their involvement in festivals and activities, Heath Hands volunteers continue to promote the importance of Hampstead Heath to their wider networks of colleagues, friends and Heath visitors, and are therefore essential in engaging our local community.
32. Along with Heath Hands, NLOS has another exceptional volunteer partnership with the Queen's Park Residents' Association. 30 volunteers organised and worked alongside NLOS staff to implement the popular and very successful 'Queen's Park Day' attended by 12,000 members of the public. With their expertise in organising large festivals and events, these 30 volunteers from the Residents' Association also organised Queen's Park's first Book Fair, which was very well attended by the local community. Queen's Park staff are also building on their successful partnership with Transition Town, who were managing two raised beds for vegetables as a community project. The project has now expanded with more volunteers from Transition Town resulting in more vegetable plots being maintained for the community. Local beekeepers have also

contributed their time and expertise to Queen's Park by managing seven beehives in the Park.

West Ham Park

33. In the last year 1,574 hours of volunteering have helped to make the Park a welcoming place to visit. The Friends of West Ham Park contributed greatly to this total with their popular events ranging from Park in the Dark, in which local people make their own lanterns and experience the Park after closing time, to educational bat walks attracting large numbers; 70 people in October 2011. Fun and energetic Leaf Pile events involved local people, the local scouts group and sea cadets in making the biggest leaf pile in Newham. The Friends nature walks were held again this year along with the annual promotion of the RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch campaign. Nature related craft stalls are always part of a Friends event encouraging young people to learn about nature whilst having fun. These wonderful imaginative events are a chance for all to get involved in their local Park whilst enjoying work in the outdoors.
34. The successful Food Growing project located in the playground continued for a third year and showed visitors to the Park how to grow food in small areas in a sustainable way and without the need for outdoor space. The project was a great opportunity for our work experience candidates to get involved in community gardening. Huge developments have been made to the Food Growing project in the latter parts of 2011 and early 2012 thanks to funding from the City Bridge Trust. A new Jubilee Food Garden has been created in the area next to the playground with six permanent raised beds and an irrigation system using water from a ground water borehole. This area has already allowed several schools and organisations to be involved in the Park including young people from BTCV's Earn Your Travel Back scheme who created the compost bins, 75 Year 1 children from Park Primary who helped to plant the edible hedge around the fence line and a Year 3 class from Colegrave Primary who helped to plant a wildflower meadow. It is planned that this area will continue to be an excellent way for local schools and people to be involved in volunteering in their local Park for years to come.
35. The Park has continued to provide several work placements from local schools and other organisations giving candidates the opportunity to learn and carry out gardening in the Park. The Nursery also continues to provide an annual volunteer placement for two days a week. The volunteer involved with this placement is greatly appreciated for his hard work and dedication spanning 18 years.

City Gardens

36. The City Gardens Team support and encourage volunteering across the Square Mile and over the last year 1,213.5 volunteer hours have been accumulated; an increase of 17% from 2010/2011.
37. The City Gardens Team has had a successful year in engaging a wide variety of people in volunteering, from schools, businesses, community groups and individuals. Through these groups many achievements have been made, from conducting wildlife surveys, creating habitats for wildlife, improving the estates where people live to running a variety of events and activities for all to enjoy.
38. Lots of conservation work has been carried out by the Barbican residents volunteering at the Fann Street Wildlife Garden. Achievements have included the construction of a new pond to create an aquatic habitat, the installation of nest boxes and bird feeders including ensuring they remain topped up, carrying out a bird count in the garden, creating a stunning wildflower meadow, opening the garden as part of the Open Garden Squares Weekend in June and the planting of 105 tree whips with a local school to celebrate the Queens Diamond Jubilee.
39. We have continued to work with residents to improve where they live, for example we worked with children from the Middlesex Street Estate to carry out bedding and bulb planting. Some of the planted areas were being damaged when the children played ball games on the estate. In response to this we involved children with the planting to encourage a sense of ownership over the planted spaces and to look after them.
40. 72 school children from St. Paul's Cathedral Choir School volunteered in 4 sessions to plant a new biodiversity border and learn about wildlife in the City at St Pauls Cathedral Churchyard. Beavers, Cubs and Scouts volunteering to clean up the Queenshithe section of the river with Thames 21, build log piles, re-build the insect hotel at West Smithfield, and conduct wildlife surveys at Bunhill Fields.
41. We co-ordinated and ran the very popular RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch and the Summer Reading Challenge in association with the Barbican Children's Library. Volunteers from Orange Rock corps carried out fence painting at Bunhill Fields. We continued the Green Garden Lunchtimes – a week-long event promoting use of City Gardens by the local community and workers, whilst working alongside local businesses and organisations to provide free drop-in workshops and talks along a 'green' or healthy outdoors lifestyles themes.

42. In the year ahead the City Gardens Team will continue to support local groups, individuals, schools and businesses volunteering in the Square Mile and will look for further opportunities to engage more people.

City of London Cemetery

43. Volunteering is not currently offered at the Cemetery. However, the Cemetery Manager now attends the Volunteer Improvement Group and is exploring the possibility of introducing volunteering.

Volunteer Hours

44. The work carried out by volunteers allows the Superintendents to make the best use of their overall resources and increase the scope and diversity of their operations. The range of activities listed in this report demonstrates how many different tasks volunteers have been able to accomplish.
45. The volunteer hours contributed in 2011/12 compared to the position reported last year can be summarised as follows:

| | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Epping Forest | 8,833 | 8,543 |
| EFCT | 5,656 | 6,415 |
| EFCV | 4,362 | 4,578 |
| Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common | 7,199 | 6,200 |
| City Commons | 10,995 | 11,230 |
| North London Open Spaces | 5,502 | 6,459 |
| West Ham Park | 1,494 | 1,574 |
| City Gardens | 1,040 | 1,214 |
| TOTAL | 45, 081 | 46,213 |

46. In the last year there has been an increase in volunteering, with 1,132 more hours worked than in the previous year, an increase of 2.5%. The departmental target for 2011/12 was to achieve a 3% increase in volunteer hours worked, which was recognised as a challenge because the 2010/11 figure represented a significant increase on the year before.
47. In 2011 the London Living Wage was £8.30/hour. It would not be unreasonable to multiply the total number of volunteer hours contributed during 2011/12 by this amount to suggest that the financial value of volunteering was at least £384,000. However, were the City to employ people to undertake these duties, employment costs would push the figure

to around £10/hour, so a total value figure of £462,000 would be more appropriate.

48. All volunteers continue to be provided with appropriate personal protective equipment and clothing, as required. Where possible and to recognise the work they carry out, visits are arranged to show some volunteers how some of the City's other Open Spaces are managed.

Strategic Implications

49. Working with volunteers supports the City Together Strategy theme of 'the Heart of a World Class City which is safer and stronger by strengthening the City's third sector to further meet the needs of our communities and promote volunteering'. The work volunteers carry out also supports one of the objectives in the current departmental Business Plan 'to provide focused learning opportunities for staff and volunteers to feel confident in meeting the changing needs of the organisation'.

Conclusion

50. The City encourages volunteers to get involved in the management of all its sites and the Open Spaces continue to benefit from the valuable support these groups provide. Well established groups exist at all our larger sites and the volunteers provide vital assistance in undertaking a wide range of projects and assist with other tasks ranging from sports development to wildlife surveys and support for special events. The Superintendents recognise that our volunteers should feel valued and appreciated as they are regarded as an important asset and should be provided with appropriate training and meaningful work assignments. To this end the Open Spaces Department has introduced a Volunteer Strategy to establish the overarching principles under which each division can develop its own policy on volunteering.

Contact:

Andy Thwaites

01372 279083

Andrew.thwaites@cityoflondon.gov.uk