

Committee(s)	Dated:
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee – For Information	7.11.2016
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Woods and Queen’s Park Management Committee – For Information	21.11.2016
Subject: Ponds Project Progress Report	Public
Report of: Philip Everett – Project Director Bob Warnock – Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, Open Spaces	For Information
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Summary

The Hampstead Heath Ponds Project is now in the final month of its 18 month construction programme. Most of the work remaining is focused on environmental restoration works and includes aquatic planting, turfing, seeding and tree and shrub planting. Some of this work will take place outside of the construction completion date due to the seasonal nature of the work. The construction element of the project is due to be completed, on time, by the end of October 2016. Despite some delays in the project’s first year, the project has made good progress over the last few months, helped by favourable weather conditions.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Ponds Project was initiated following a series of hydrological studies which revealed that in the event of a severe storm, there was a risk that the reservoirs on Hampstead Heath could overtop, potentially leading to erosion and dam failure, putting lives, property and infrastructure at risk. Between 2012 and the summer of 2014, a highly iterative and consultative process was undertaken to consider the design criteria and approach, and then a wide range of options. In June 2014, an option for each chain of ponds was selected and approved on the

basis that it satisfied the existing requirements of the Reservoirs Act 1975 and the anticipated requirements under the Flood & Water Management Act 2010, whilst preserving the natural aspect and state of the Heath in the most effective manner, in accordance with the City's duties under the Hampstead Heath Act 1871, and in accordance with the agreed design principles.

2. Following Committee approval in June 2014, a planning application was submitted to the London Borough of Camden in July 2014 and planning consent was granted by Camden's Development Control Committee, subject to Conditions and a Section 106 agreement, in January 2015. Construction work on the Ponds Project started in April 2015.

Project progress

3. Over the summer months the majority of work has been focused on the two more substantial work sites in each chain of ponds (Model Boating Pond and the Catchpit). Work at these two locations has involved a large amount of earthworks and the weather has provided favourable conditions resulting in good progress, allowing BAM Nuttall to catch up on time lost during delays earlier in the project.
4. The earthworks at Model Boating Pond are now finished and the Heath's ecology team have devised a detailed restoration plan which has been considered by Members of this Committee. It splits the large compound area to the west of the hillside in various different areas which are to be seeded with the most appropriate native seed mixes. The finished result will look attractive and natural due to the inclusion of wildflowers and grasses. It will also help benefit biodiversity, specifically birds, bees and other insects. The larger areas are to be hydroseeded. This is a planting process which uses a mulch of seed and water which is sprayed from a hose. It enables large areas to be seeded in a relatively short space of time. A close working relationship between the Heath's Ecologists and the Project Team has ensured all of the environmental restoration is appropriate, and beneficial to the Heath. In total, six hectares of wild flower meadow will be sown by the end of the project.
5. As the landscaping work at Model Boating Pond has progressed we have encouraged BAM Nuttall to open paths around the site, for example the path on top of the new dam. This has enabled Heath visitors to monitor progress and we have had many favourable comments from the public who think the new island and hillside look good and fit in to the surrounding landscape.
6. Elsewhere on the Highgate Chain, works have been completed at Stock Pond, Men's Bathing Pond and Bird Sanctuary, and are nearly finished at Highgate No. 1 Pond. The Ladies Pond facility, which opened as planned for swimming on programme on Saturday, 7 May 2016 and has just completed a a planned closure for two weeks so that essential maintenance work can take place. This includes the resurfacing of the path by the building to a more appropriate surface, and the replacement of the changing room floors, so that water drains from them in the correct way. This closure was timed to take place in October when the facility is quieter to minimised impact to swimmers. Ladies only swimming has been made available at Mixed Pond during the two week closure period.

7. On the Hampstead Chain, the Catchpit dam is now at its finished 5.6m height, built with clay excavated from borrow pits on Pryor's Field. The borrow pit is almost completely filled up. When it has been filled up, top soil will be replaced and the area hydroseeded with appropriate wildflower and native grass mix like the Model Boating Pond compound. The only other work remaining on the Hampstead Chain is aquatic planting. In total, 25,000 new aquatic plants of 15 different species will be planted as an environmental enhancement of the project. This will result in an additional 1,700 cubic metres of aquatic planting which is an important habitat the Heath does not have in abundance
8. Desilting work, using a suction technique, has successfully taken place at four ponds, which includes all three bathing ponds. This work will improve water-quality and benefit aquatic life. Viaduct Pond has also been desilted as part of the project. A different technique was employed here due to the amount of debris in the pond. The debris, which was mainly logs and branches, was excavated first from a floating platform, and then silt was removed from the same platform. Three large piles of logs and other debris, including an old moped were removed from the pond. Approximately 1000 meters cubed of silt was also removed in this way.
9. Aerators have been installed at each of the ponds to also help improve water quality. These are powered by an electrical supply and the controls are housed in nearby green cabinets, which are approximately 1.5m by 1.5m. A planting scheme is currently being devised to help camouflage these green boxes at a couple of locations, namely Highgate No. 1 pond and Stock Pond. We intend to install a planting box to the top of the green cabinet and grow ivy and honeysuckle down the sides.
10. As the project enters its final stages, a water safety review has taken place at all of the ponds to consider signage and placement of life rings, in relation to advice taken from an independent water safety expert. The new signs are currently in production and will be erected soon.
11. Changes to the design have happened at a number of sites, with 101 contract instructions since the project began. Many of these have been related to the sensitive nature of the Heath, and include changing path locations or construction methods due to proximity of trees, or indeed a single tree. The design is continually monitored on site and adapted to meet the requirements of the Heath.

Planning Conditions, Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

12. The project has no outstanding planning conditions.
13. The Community Working Group, which was set up as part of Camden's planning conditions, has continued to meet monthly to monitor the progress of the project. This group have been holding evening meetings monthly since February 2015 and also take part in regular guided walks of the site. They monitor various

aspects of the project, including complaints, environmental data, vehicle movements and the programme.

14. Other communications on the project have received praise from the public, including the weekly emails with updates on the project which are currently being sent to around 800 subscribers. The Ponds Project blog has also been favourably received and regularly receives around 2000 visits per month and has received as many as 4,300 visits in one month. It can be found at <https://hampsteadheathpondsproject.wordpress.com>. The blog will continue to provide information on the restoration phase of the Ponds Project and is being extended to cover wider Heath news and information.

15. A series of 'Lessons Learnt' meetings are due to take place involving Officers who have been involved in the project and stakeholders who were involved in the consultation process. Following these meetings a report will be written by the Project Director.

Financial Summary

16. As the project draws to a conclusion it is now clear that not all of the risks identified at the start of the project have been realised. The partnering team are currently in process of agreeing the final account and any outstanding claims are being dealt with in accordance with contract. It is expected that the project will be delivered within the approved budget.

Conclusion

17. The project is due to be finished on programme and we are very pleased with the finished landscaping work. The public are much more positive about the work now the focus is turning to the reinstatement and the legacy it will create.

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