

Committee	Dated:
Highgate Wood Consultative Group	22 November 2017
Subject: Superintendents Update for November 2017	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Discussion
Report author: Jonathan Meares – Open Spaces Department	

Summary

This report provides an update to Members on management and operational activities in Highgate Wood since May 2017. The report describes progress on operational working arrangements and income generation, sustainability, conservation and woodland management, infrastructure and facilities. This report also reviews progress with the Woodland Management Plan and a draft is appended for comments (see Appendix 1).

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Members note the content of this report.
- Members provide comments and feedback on the proposed draft Woodland Management Plan (Appendix 1).

Main Report

Revised working arrangements

1. A 12 month review is currently underway, following implementation of the working arrangements in October 2016.
2. The Highgate Wood Team are discussing a number of changes to improve team working whilst providing a better work life balance.

Roman Kiln Project

3. The Working Group are progressing the formation of the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) through the Charity Commission, and hope to have this finalised by the end of 2017. Catherine West is the CIO Chairperson, and the Group are planning to speak about the project and the newly formed Charity at Bruce Castle Museum in February 2017.

4. The Highgate Wood Manager will discuss the Project with the Superintendent and the Director of Open Spaces in the New Year to investigate how the City of London could deliver the work on the Education Centre which will be the future home of the artefact. The Roman Kiln Project remains on the City of London's 'Project Vision' site, and monthly updates are being provided in preparation of a future HLF bid in 2018.

Sustainability

5. Highgate Wood continues to pursue sustainable solutions to all operational tasks. The increasing use of battery operated chainsaws, along with leaf blowers, strimmers and hedge trimmers all reduce the site's carbon footprint and fuel consumption. Battery operated machinery also has a reduced health risk for the operator, with zero emissions, and reduced noise levels.
6. The recently installed hot water system for The Pavilion changing rooms is working well and the issues with the controls have now been resolved.

Woodland Conservation and Tree Management

7. The Senior Ecologist, Highgate Wood Manager and members of the Highgate Wood Team have written a first draft of the Woodland Management Plan which is appended to this report, and comments and feedback from this Group are welcomed.
8. The Highgate Wood Manager is considering applying for grant aid from the Forestry Commission (FC) to carry out work specified in the forthcoming Management Plan. Any grant application has to be accompanied by a plan in the FC's established format, and for this reason the Management Plan has been prepared to follow this format.
9. Drafts have been produced of several important sections of the Management Plan, including the Vision, Objectives and Management Strategy. The draft Management Plan provides a sample description and management options for a single compartment in an appendix. Current work focusses on completing similar information for the rest of the Wood. There are six proposed compartments across the site.
10. The squirrel trapping operation continues and to date 86 squirrels have been caught along with two rats. It is still too early to report on any impact that this has had to reduce the bark stripping that has occurred over the last two to three years. The current intention is to continue with the trapping as a means of managing the Woods squirrel population and reducing the bark stripping on both hornbeam and beech.
11. Phase two of the work on the current Conservation Area will start in November, with additional coppicing of hornbeam and hollies. The area has already started to regenerate and the Team intend to plant a number of young saplings, notably oaks.

Ecology

12. A Research Fellow at the Institute of Zoology at Regents Park conducted a survey of hedgehogs last summer in and around greater North London, from Alexandra Palace, Highgate Wood, Queen's Woods, parts of Hampstead Heath, and then Regent's Park. The intention is to find establish where hedgehogs still live in our parks and neighbouring gardens, and use this

information to better understand how we might be able to improve conditions for urban hedgehogs.

13. The Ecology Team assisted with the survey in Highgate Wood in June 2017 using a network of cameras installed across the site. Numbers of hedgehog sightings have dropped dramatically since 2012, so the single hedgehog sighting during the four week survey was not really a great surprise. Golder's Hill Park in contrast has a thriving population and may be an important refuge site for this threatened species.
14. The tawny owls successfully raised two chicks in the 2007 Conservation Area and a number of photo opportunities arose once they started to appear outside the nest (see Appendix 2, Figure 1).

Volunteer activity

15. Heath Hands sessions started in September and will finish in November before commencing again in January through to March 2018. The average group size in nine volunteers and these have been very productive to date with the focus on bramble management, removing ivy from trees, repairing sections of hedge, and further mulching to the bluebell path.
16. Once we have finalised the new Woodland Management Plan, and the document has received approval, it will form the long term work programme for future volunteer activity within Highgate Wood.

Oak decline and oak regeneration

17. The Forest Research arm of the FC is currently investing significant money and resource to tackle Acute Oak Decline (AOD) and Chronic Oak Decline (COD). There are other parallel studies taking place on oak decline, with differing opinions on the causal agent for the two conditions. Interestingly this research is proposing that the two conditions are the same and that the causal agent may be drought stress.
18. Highgate Wood Team's own work on oak decline is continuing alongside an annual survey for oak regeneration. The results after eight years of surveying suggesting that the oak stock are currently in a phase of stability, following a cycle of accelerated decline which appears to have slowed in 2010 or shortly afterwards. The average death rate for the site is around 12 trees annually which in simple terms equates to approximately one percent of the oak population on the site. When the survey started in 2010 there was a fear that the death rate was actually much higher but this situation has improved as the survey has progressed.
19. The rate of oak regeneration continues to be a concern, with over 70% of the seedlings that have been protected with shelters, being lost to drought stress or mildew or a combination of the two factors. There is renewed interest in planting young oak saplings of local provenance, probably from Hampstead Heath, and this will be included in the new Woodland Management Plan.

Fees & Charges 2018/19

20. The proposed fees and charges for 2018/19 were circulated to Members via email on 20 October. Feedback received was that the proposed fees and charges were reasonable.

Tree disease and biosecurity issues

21. Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) was not discovered in Highgate Wood this summer, but may be present though as yet undetected. Later this autumn after leaf fall the Division's Tree Team will carry out surveying to search for nests on the perimeter of the woodland and in high use areas such as the play area.
22. The Open Spaces Director has formed a Biosecurity Working Group made up of Tree Managers from Royal Parks and City of London's Open Spaces. The group will meet annually but will also provide an opportunity to work more closely together on shared issues such as OPM, AOD and COD. We will also continue to work closely with Haringey's Tree Team to support their control of OPM in Queen's Wood.

Sports and Recreation

23. The Cricket season progressed well with only one game being cancelled due to inclement weather. The Cricket Teams were very complimentary of the hard work the staff put in and standard of the pitches.
24. The football season is now underway with our regular Teams booked in for the season. The entire field has been slit and over seeded to help fill the gaps and bare areas from the summer.

Pavilion Café update

25. In April 2017, Members of the Highgate Wood Consultative Committee were consulted via e-mail in relation to the Café Options Appraisal Report. The report recommendation was for new three year leases to be negotiated with the current providers at the Highgate Wood, Parliament Hill and Golders Hill Park Cafés. The feedback received was supportive of this approach.
26. On 15 May 2017, a report was presented to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee. Following a decision by Members, new three year leases will be negotiated with the current providers of the Highgate Wood, Parliament Hill and Golders Hill Park Cafés, to commence in January 2018, and end in January 2021. The Service Standards and Performance Indicators that have been developed following the Cafe Engagement and Consultation Exercise will be used to monitor and measure the cafés performance.
27. The City of London Surveyor's Department are currently negotiating with the current provider of the Highgate Wood Café with regard to the annual base rent for the three year period. The negotiations have included a discussion in relation to the responsibility for the cleansing of the public toilets which are adjacent to the café premises. The new lease will require the café current provider to clean these toilets. This change will allow the Highgate Wood Team to focus their duties on other areas, such as conservation.

Community and Events

28. Members discussed the ecological impact of licenced events and visitor numbers on the woodland at length at their meeting in May of this year. It was also requested that further information on visitor numbers, fees charged, and rules on attendance be provided. This information is being collated and will be presented to the Group in April 2018 as a report. This will allow the Group to discuss whether or not they consider a restriction on future licenced activities to be appropriate.
29. The Highgate Wood Manager has reviewed the data from licenced events and there has been a 5% reduction in numbers of attendees compared to the same period in 2016 (based on information up to September 2017). It is suspected that the real growth in numbers is attributable to the increasing number of school visits which are taking place which are not booked through the office and which we need to start tracking. More information on this will be provided at the meeting on 22 November 2017.
30. The Community Heritage Day was held on the 3 September 2017 and was once again a great success. The Highgate Wood Team are very grateful for ongoing support and free time given by the Friends of Highgate Wood, The Highgate Society and a number of other local Community Groups. The now well established dog show was more popular than ever and the Monkey Do installation drew in big crowds throughout the day.

Infrastructure and buildings

31. The installation of the secure storage box and the post box inside the pedestrian access removing the necessity for early morning deliveries to be made directly to the café has made a significant impact in reducing vehicle movements in the wood.
32. All the areas in the playground have now been 'retrofitted' with rubberised tiger mulch. Decayed logs were removed from around both the large sandpit, space net and aerial runway and new timber has been installed.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

33. The City of London Corporation's Corporate Plan (2015-2019) states under Key Policy Priority 5 '*Developing and improving the physical environment around our key cultural attractions; and providing safe, secure, and accessible Open Spaces*'.
34. It will also help fulfil the Open Space's Department's Business Plan 2016-2019 Vision to '*Preserve and protect our world class green spaces for the benefit of our local communities and the environment*'. The content of this report also has a direct impact on the five core values of Quality, Inclusion, Environment, Promotion and People, and contributes to all four of the Department's key objectives.

Financial Implications

35. The operational requirements highlighted in the report will be met from the Superintendent's Local Risk Budget. Additional financial information will be provided at the meeting on the 22 November 2017.

Conclusion

36. The new Woodland Management Plan, currently appended in draft form, will consolidate and prioritise objectives for the next ten years, with a focus on conserving the oak population, optimising regeneration, and enhancing the ecological value of the site. The almost inevitable arrival of OPM next spring will be carefully planned for, and we will continue working closely with the Friends of the Roman Kiln, and supporting a second Heritage Lottery Fund application bid.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – draft Woodland Management Plan
- Appendix 2 - Figures 1 & 2

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