

Committees: Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee	Dated: 29 January 2018
Subject: Policy for Bench Dedications and Sponsorships at Hampstead Heath	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Hampstead Heath	For Discussion
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Summary

The draft Policy for bench dedications and sponsorships sets out a clear framework for the management of benches at Hampstead Heath. The draft Policy is based on recommendations and principles that were presented to this Committee in March 2017 and it updates the current position on the dedication and sponsorship of benches in light of a review of the existing ‘memorial bench’ scheme conducted throughout 2016 and 2017.

Following consultation with Members of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee a final policy will be submitted to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen’s Park Committee for approval.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

- Members consider the draft Policy (see appendix 1) for bench dedications and sponsorships and provide comments and feedback.

Main Report

Background

1. Following a review of management of the ‘memorial bench’ scheme at Hampstead Heath, six recommendations for addressing the backlog in bench dedications were drafted. These were agreed by Members of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen’s Park Committee in May 2017.
2. There is a long tradition of dedicating benches on the Heath dating back to the 1970s and, today, many benches that pre-date 1995 are reaching the end of their serviceable life.
3. There has been a gradual increase in demand for bench dedications over time which led to past Superintendents implementing an informal cap on the total number of benches and their locations.

4. Incomplete sponsorship records and uncertainty about terms and length of historical agreements have meant that renewal or re-dedication of benches has become complicated. Recognising the sensitive nature of these requests, a waiting list was established approximately ten years ago to manage requests fairly and transparently.
5. In 2015 a temporary hold was placed on the waiting list and no new applications were accepted pending a review of the scheme. A survey was completed in 2016 to map the location and assess the condition of 550 benches across the Heath.

Current Position

6. Development of a draft Policy for bench dedications and sponsorships is a key element of a priority project in the proposed 2018/19 Divisional Plan. The project aims to achieve a high quality service that is self-funding by 2020.
7. Building on the six recommendations agreed in May 2017, a protocol has been developed to ensure historic bench dedications are handled with sensitivity and fairness to ensure people who have sponsored a bench in the past have adequate opportunity to get in contact and to make arrangements. An ongoing trial of this protocol commenced in 2017 across the Heath and has received a positive response with over 90 contacts made in response to seeing a notice. The draft policy sets out this protocol in detail.
8. Annual maintenance and repair of benches is prioritised in the Annual Work Programme (AWP) for Operations, including a programme for replacement of benches that are reaching the end of their serviceable life. Administration of the sponsorship service is set out in the Support Services section of the AWP.
9. The draft Policy has been prepared following a benchmarking exercise of comparable bench schemes administered by neighbouring local authorities and open space managers. It has been drafted to be consistent with the terminology and procedures used by other Open Spaces Divisions, particularly the Epping Forest policy for dedications and sponsorships developed in 2017, while specifically addressing aspects unique to the Heath.

Consultation

10. The guidance set out in the draft Policy has been discussed with Members of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee over a number of walks during 2016, resulting in six recommendations that were agreed by Members of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queen's Park Committee May 2017.

Next Steps

11. Following consultation with Members a proposed policy will be submitted to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee for approval 2018.

12. Progress will be reported annually via the reporting framework being developed for the Divisional Plan and the AWP.

Financial Implications

13. A key aim of the improvements to the bench dedications and sponsorships scheme is to provide a high quality service that is self-funding on an annual basis. No change to fees and charges for sponsorships is proposed at this time. Fees and charges will be reviewed on an annual basis and will continue to be set out annually for Committee approval. The draft Policy sets out the structure for fees and charges associated with bench sponsorships.

Corporate Implications

14. The draft Policy has been developed in the context of the Open Spaces Business Plan and the 2007 Hampstead Heath Management Plan. It will be implemented via the Management Framework for the Division, with key actions to be prioritised on an annual basis, commencing with the 2018/19 financial year.

Conclusion

15. The draft Policy for bench dedications and sponsorships sets out a clear framework (see appendix 1) for effective management of benches at Hampstead Heath. The Superintendent seeks feedback from Members prior to finalising the Policy.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Draft Policy for Bench Dedications and Sponsorships at Hampstead Heath.

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