

| | | |
|------------------|--|-------------|
| Report to | Mousehold Heath conservators 15 June 2018 | Item |
| Report of | Head of citywide services | 9 |
| Subject | Mousehold Heath Conservators annual report 2017-18 | |

Purpose

To report on the work carried out on Mousehold Heath on behalf of the Mousehold Conservators for the period 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018.

Recommendation

- 1) To note the contents of the report.
- 2) To produce a simplified summary version of the report highlights, in a colour, A3 folded version, including photographs.
- 3) To include information about the heath to raise awareness of its value as an open space and the opportunities it has to offer for residents and visitors.
- 4) To delegate authority to the Parks and open spaces manager to produce the finished version of the summary report with the communications team .
- 5) To produce a PDF version of the finished summary report for the Norwich City Council website, a hard copy of the document for each member of the committee, and also copies for circulation to local schools.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority city of character and culture

Financial implications

Any financial implications arising from this report will have or will be met from approved budgetary provision

Contact officers

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Simon Meek Parks and open spaces manager | 01603 212403 |
| Will Stewart Mousehold warden | 01603 213110 |
| Nigel Hales Mousehold warden | 01603 213310 |

Background documents

None

Report

Background

1. In recent years, the Mousehold Conservators have prepared a full colour, multi page annual report.
2. The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of management works undertaken during the course of the year, to highlight the level of community involvement in the site, a summary of any biological surveys undertaken.
3. The report had an element of looking forward within it.
4. The document was lengthy and required considerable resources to produce it
5. Following the publication of the previous year's report the Conservators asked that the format of the report be considered for a review, with regards to the aims of making people aware of the work of the Conservators, the value of the heath as unique city open space and also the opportunities it has to offer for formal and informal recreation and education.
6. This year a detailed annual report has been produced to inform the Mousehold Conservators Committee of the work carried out this year on their behalf. A simplified summary version of the report highlights, in a full colour, A3 folded version, including photographs will be produced.
7. The summary report will include highlights of the year, to raise awareness of its value as an open space and the opportunities it has to offer for residents and visitors. It will also highlight key projects happening in the current reporting year.

2017 – 2018 report

People

Volunteering

8. During the reporting period 4278 hours of volunteer time were recorded for the site in the last year. The tasks were organised and supervised by the Mousehold wardens, to ensure that the practical works were carried out in a safe working environment and adhering to the management plan objectives.
9. Since its inception in early 2017, the Mousehold Heath Mouseketeers Volunteer Group, led by the Mousehold wardens, has developed considerably, with in excess of 15 volunteers contributing on a regular basis.
10. A wide range of practical management tasks were undertaken including; bracken and grass cutting and raking, path maintenance, coppicing, woodland thinning, tree safety works, litter picking, installation of bollards and benches, sapling pulling, and wildlife surveys.
11. The volunteer programme provides an opportunity for the community to be involved with the management of the site and also from the mental and physical health benefits of being active in the outdoors.

12. Volunteering improves people's understanding and enjoyment of the site, builds up a sense of pride and ownership and enables projects to be delivered beyond the scope of the available budget.
13. The following groups contributed to the delivery of the management plan this year:
 - i) The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)
 - ii) Mousehold Heath Mousketeers Volunteer Group
 - iii) Mousehold Heath Defenders
 - iv) The Assist Trust
 - v) Norwich City College Duke of Edinburgh group
 - vi) Easton College Foundation student group
 - vii) RBS, Aviva, Amey, Ethical Investment, Naked Wine Company Corporate groups
 - viii) Students from George White and Charles Darwin School
 - ix) City College student group
 - x) Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award work placement.
 - xi) Norwich High School for Girls
 - xii) Friends of Ketts Heights
 - xiii) Many individual volunteers from the community

Community involvement

14. Through guided walks, education activities, volunteer work days and other activities, there has been an increase in partnership working this year.
15. Community groups, business and education organisations that have been worked on and used the heath are Norwich High School for Girls, Norwich School, City College, George White/Mousehold Avenue/Parkside Schools, Assist Trust, Norwich Workers Educational Association (WEA), Aviva corporate group, etc.
16. Corporate Community Action Days were held involving employees from Amey, RBS and the Naked Wine Company, who undertook practical tasks to improve the site for people and wildlife.
17. The site, with its accessible city centre location, is an ideal environment for children to experience the 'great outdoors'. The conservator's ongoing development of environmental education has continued this year.
18. Work has been done to encourage and implement Forest School activities and other environmental education and conservation management activities. Pupils from Mousehold Avenue infants, Parkside, Charles Darwin and over 100 pupils from George White School. These events were popular with the pupils and also parents.
19. The activities increase involvement, understanding and enjoyment for local children and local community groups regarding nature conservation and its importance.
20. A memorial service was held for Pat Siano at the band stand on the Fountain Ground celebrate her life and dedication to Mousehold Heath. In recognition of her voluntary work as a member of the Mousehold Conservators and Mousehold Heath Defenders a plaque was installed on the Band Stand, dedicated to her memory.

Partnership working

21. A bat box survey was put in place working with the Norwich Bat Group and The Ecological Consultancy, to enable data to be collected relating to the bats which use the heath. This will help to inform management decisions made in the future.

Activities and events

22. While the heath is used considerably for informal recreation, the Conservators have continued their work to increase the opportunity for appropriate walks, events and activities to be held on the heath.

745 attended the walks and events programme; an increase of 428 people compared to last year.

23. A guided walks and events programme was organised and led by the wardens and local naturalists, to increase involvement, understanding and enjoyment of the site.

24. Walks this year included:

- i) Wildlife Watch Walks organised in Winter/Spring/Summer and Autumn in partnership with a local wildlife expert. All were very well attended.
- ii) Fungi forays.
- iii) Dawn chorus walk
- iv) Butterfly and site management walk.
- v) Four moth survey evenings.
- vi) Two Norwich HEART Heritage Weekend walks were organised. The first was a geological themed, superbly led walk by Tim Holt-Wilson, supported by the wardens. The second was a fascinating social and landscape history walk, focussing on the stories of St William's Chapel and Kett's Rebellion by local historian Colin Howey. Both walks were fully booked and a great success.
- vii) A number of additional walks were led by the wardens for specific groups and members of the community throughout the year on request, including walks for Norwich WEA, Corporate groups and Charles Darwin School.

25. Events this year included:

- i) A Winter solstice gathering was organised by the Mousehold Defenders to mark the shortest day and longest night of the year, which was held adjacent to the wild flower meadow, Gilman Road
- ii) Two Brass Band concerts took place at the Fountain Ground on June 11th and 23rd July; these were free for the public to attend.
- iii) Charles Darwin School (Mini Mouseholders) environmental activities.
- iv) Roots weekly forest fitness classes have been a success taking place on Sunday mornings adjacent to the Pavilion starting at 8.30am to 09.45. In addition, two Yoga classes aimed at women are also being trailed from 12.00 till 16.00.
- v) Stay and play children's environmental activities are ongoing, and proving to be very popular.
- vi) Armistice Remembrance Day service taken place at the Airman's Plaque war memorial arranged by the Mousehold Heath Defenders.
- vii) A Playdays event was organised by the Norwich City Council Events team on 24th July, from 11.00am to 3.00pm, on the Fountain Ground, including environmental education activities with the RSPB, face painting and other

organised outdoor activities. This was very well supported and enjoyed by local residents.

- viii) A local teacher formed the Mousehold Heath Theatre Company, organising a number of activities for children, with the support of the Norwich City Council events team and Mousehold wardens.

Sports

Football Pitch

26. A full sized football pitch is available at the Fountain Ground Sports Pitch, Gurney Road, including changing rooms, showers and toilets. During the 2016/17 season.
27. Income from the hire of the football pitch in 2017 – 18 was £1,228.
28. A review of formal and informal sports provision on the heath will take place in 2019/20.

Nature

Heathland management

29. Lowland heathland is a scarce and threatened habitat and only a sixth of the heathland that was present in England in 1800 now remains.
30. However, Britain still has 20 per cent of the world's total area of heathland and this makes it important to conserve the existing heathland areas and look for opportunities to extend them.
31. The Government UK Biodiversity Action Plan for Lowland Heathland includes targets for establishing more lowland heathland to provide space for wildlife and open access to members of the community.
32. Similar declines have been seen in acid grassland habitat. Both of these habitats can be found at Mousehold and provide a home to a high number of scarce and threatened species.
33. One of the priority management objectives is to address the reduction of open heathland and acid grassland across the site, which has been happening over the last 40 years. Of the total area of 88 hectares, only 9 hectares of Mousehold is covered by heathland.
34. In 2012, Norwich City Council secured - on behalf of the conservators – grant funding from Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS), to restore and conserve areas of heathland and acid grassland over a 10 year period.
35. A grant of £30,600 was awarded to be paid in equal annual payments until the year 2022. This funding has been allocated to restoring heathland and acid grassland, removing scrub, mowing with a tractor-mounted Rytex mower, grinding stumps and stripping humus, giving heather seeds in the seed bank a chance to grow. This has resulted in existing heathland areas being enlarged and linked up.

36. The funding has enabled the Conservators to access specialist contractors to achieve this objective as part of the HLS agreement.
37. Ongoing habitat conservation improvements were carried out through the HLS agreement during 2017-18.
38. This year, a further 0.7ha of poor quality, degenerating heathland habitat, covered in dense bracken and bramble growth had works carried out to encourage re-colonisation by heather plants.
39. Removal of encroaching trees, scrub and bracken from existing heathland area's has been carried out, these works are usually undertaken by volunteers, in compliance with the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement. The works also include humus stripping and the use of a cut and collect machine to control nutrient enrichment of soil, in line with management plan objectives.
40. Future management will increasingly move from heathland restoration to maintenance as areas in the agreement are restored.

Grassland management

41. Important areas of Acid Grassland were also included in, the HLS agreement, with the Desert, Ant Hills, St. James Hill, and the area adjacent to the wildlife pond, cut once a year, in early to late autumn, depending on weather conditions.
42. All arisings were removed from the site, to minimise nutrient enrichment of the soil. This management technique maintains the acidic soil conditions required by specialist grasses and wildflowers found on the heath
43. The removal of any encroaching scrub and trees also takes place following regular plant surveys carried out with the help of volunteers to monitor plant biodiversity.
44. Where present the conservation of ant hills is ensured through sympathetic management techniques.
45. Natural England who is overseeing the HLS agreement, carried out an annual habitat condition assessment and complimented the quality and quantity of the works undertaken this year and the progress of the HLS agreement to date.

Woodland management

46. Mousehold today is largely covered in secondary woodland and scrub, consisting mainly of oak and birch, with some rowan and sycamore. These are species which readily invade open areas.
47. Natural woodland regeneration continues to be encouraged, rather than the importation of new trees, which ensures the trees within the woodland are of local provenance, minimising the spread of pests and disease.
48. Woodland areas were managed through a number of techniques to diversify and enhance the habitat through ride creation, coppicing, and pollarding.

49. Work has continued through clearance to restore woodland glades to provide a more diverse structure to the vegetation which in turn improves biodiversity.
50. Work to restore a section of woodland adjacent to Gilman Road by clearing dead and overgrown vegetation and thinning trees was continued. This work has been carried out to increase community access to a formally impenetrable area and improve biodiversity.
51. There has been a large amount of woodland management work carried out by the Mousehold wardens and volunteers.

Tree safety management

52. Due to exceptionally high winds experienced through parts of 2017-18 and particularly during storm force winds on 18.01.18 (which brought down over 50 trees), an above average number of tree works were carried out by the Mousehold wardens to make dangerous trees safe, especially next to and over main pathways. Over one hundred individual tree issues were identified by the wardens on tree safety surveys, routine patrols and reported by members of the community.
53. Tree surveys carried out by the Mousehold Wardens on a six monthly basis, in September 2017 and March 2018, identified a total of 45 trees, adjacent to or blocking pathways, which were dead, dying or dangerous and requiring, in some cases, urgent attention or ongoing monitoring..
54. Where possible, dead/dying trees were retained, to encourage a diverse structure to the woodland and to ensure there is a supply of dead and decaying wood for those specialist species which require it. Trees identified as posing an unacceptable level of safety risk were removed.
55. Norwich Norse (Environmental) Ltd, the council's joint venture company carried out essential tree safety works along Gurney Road.

Ecological surveying and monitoring

Butterflies

56. Two Butterfly Conservation Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (BMS) transects were surveyed by the wardens, on a weekly basis, between April and October.
57. The BMS is the largest and longest running biological survey in the country (established in 1976). Data is collected from over 1,200 sites in the UK, with 29 sites surveyed in Norfolk.
58. Butterflies are uniquely placed among British terrestrial insects and other invertebrate groups to act as indicators of the state of the environment. The results of the surveys are used by the national government to assess the impacts of climate change and the progress of governmental policy initiatives such as the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) schemes.
59. Not only are butterflies biologically suitable as indicator species, having rapid lifestyles and, in many cases, high sensitivity to environmental conditions, but the

recording and monitoring volunteer and datasets built up by Butterfly Conservation and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, enable accurate assessment of their trends.

60. When taking into consideration that butterfly numbers nationally and in Norfolk decreased in 2017, it is pleasing to see that butterfly numbers on Mousehold, when taking into account annual weather fluctuations and national population changes are increasing. The heath is bucking the decreasing county trend with both transects seeing an upward trend.
61. There were 474 (an increase of 66 compared with 2016) butterflies recorded during the survey on the Western side of Gurney Road. Sections 1, 11, which are through woodland glades. Sections 2, 5, 7, through heathland/acid grassland areas show high abundance of butterflies.
62. Recently restored open habitat areas, such as section 7, the heathland area near Wingfield, have seen a significant increase in abundance in the last two years). All Western transect route numbers are marked on the map in Yellow 1 to 11.
63. The Mousehold Heath East BMS transect survey recorded a big total of 792 (a massive 264 increase compared to 2016) butterflies, mainly in the recently managed and restored areas of the anthills (section 1) and heathland (sections 4, 5 and 6).

Moths

64. Six public moth survey evenings, along with ad hoc surveys were completed. Over 100 moths were recorded during the surveys, including 12 species new to the site (up from 7 last year). Many colourful and characteristic heath species were recorded during the surveys, including an impressive Black Arches viewed on 15.08.16 and an attractive Small Dusty Wave recorded on 12.09.16
65. These surveys have taken place adjacent to Gilman Road and Gurney Road resulting in the site species list increasing to 233 species.

Birds

66. A Common Bird Census (CBC) survey was carried out by the wardens with the help of volunteers. 30 species of bird were recorded as having breeding territories based on the CBC methodology. There was a general increase in territories during the 2016 nesting season, with Blackbirds, Greenfinches, Long tailed tits, Tree creepers and Great spotted woodpeckers, having a particularly good year. The gradual increase in the total number bird territories, suggests that conservation management work undertaken to increase habitat diversity, age and structure, along with an increasing dead wood habitat, is having a positive effect.
67. One of the many highlights out on the site this year, has been watching two young Kestrels fledge from an owl box which had been put up by the Mousehold Defenders and wardens some years ago.

Plants

68. A monthly plant survey on St James' Hill, was carried out by members of the Mousehold Heath Defenders and wardens.

69. Two further monthly surveys in the New Pond/Hawthorn Glade and the Desert wildflower area, have been carried out by members of the Mousehold Heath Defenders, recording a wide variety of nectar providing wild flowers.
70. The surveys provide important data to site managers to monitor and inform habitat conservation and management decisions. The data also increases interest, understanding and enjoyment of the site by visitors.

Bumblebees

71. A monthly Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Bee Walk survey was carried out by the Mousehold wardens, with the help of members of the Defenders, on St James Hill.
72. The transect survey recorded a number of bee species, including Buff-tailed bumblebee, White-tailed bumblebee, Red-tailed bumblebee and Common carder bee.
73. Bee numbers increased along the transect route in 2017, suggesting that habitat management work such as opening up the Cavalry Track and clearing scrub from St James Hill, to conserve grassland, is having a positive effect.

Damselflies and dragonflies

74. A number of species have been recorded such as Large red, Common blue and Azure damselflies; along with the Norfolk hawk, Red darter and Emperor dragonflies. Over 100 Migrant hawkers been recorded feeding over heathland vegetation in August. The Norfolk hawk, which is a nationally threatened and scarce British Red Data Book species, was recorded for the third year in succession. Its nearest breeding site is Thorpe Marshes so they are presumably venturing up to the heath to feed on the abundance of insects in the open habitats.
75. Many species are now seen near the Vinegar Pond which following its restoration a few years ago, is now holding water throughout the year.

Reptiles and amphibians

76. Common Lizard were recorded in good numbers throughout the spring and summer months, with many seen basking in recently restored open heathland and grassland habitats.
77. Due to the exceptionally cold weather in February and March the frogs withheld their spawning activities until the end part of March rather than February. Once the weather improved, it was a particularly good year for spawning frogs and frogspawn with large numbers of both recorded in the Vinegar Pond and a record amount of spawn seen in the Mustard Pond.
78. There were ad hoc sightings of both Slow worm and Grass snake at various locations across the site.

Infrastructure

Access

79. The Mousehold Heath Defenders working party cleared encroaching vegetation from the Tram Track, pathways adjacent to the Pitch and Putt car park, Pilot project area and the Wingfield open space improving access to the public.
80. The Disabled access pathway at Gilman Road open space constructed of Breedon gravel was re-laid as the old surface was suffering from erosion due to high usage.

Car parks

81. Annual maintenance regrading works were undertaken at the Pitch and Putt, Britannia Road and the car park in front of the Pavilion.
82. Due to the wooden bollard being repeatedly hit at the far end entrance to Britannia Road car park, a metal post was installed to reduce further costs for its repair.

Security

83. Due to concerns raised regarding unauthorised vehicular and caravan access onto the Wingfield Open Space two Rhino high security lockable bollards were installed in front of the access gate leading onto the field to improve the security of the site.
84. A wooden bollard was installed by a volunteer and Mousehold warden to prevent vehicle access from Mousehold Lane.
85. As part of the infrastructure refurbishment programme ten wooded bollards were replaced adjacent to the disabled pathway along Britannia Road.