

Report to Mousehold Heath conservators
21 June 2019
Report of Parks and open spaces manager
Subject Mousehold Heath Conservators annual report 2018-19

Item

8

Purpose

To report on the work carried out on Mousehold Heath on behalf of the Mousehold Conservators for the period 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019.

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; and
- 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 of great neighbourhoods, housing and environment.

Financial implications

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

Ward/s: Crome

Cabinet member: Councillor Packer – Health and wellbeing

Contact officer

Simon Meek, parks and open spaces manager 01603 212403

Will Stewart, Mousehold Heath warden 01603 213310

Nigel Hales, Mousehold Heath warden

01603 213310

Background documents

None

Report

Background

1. The report details the work, activities and issues arising on, and relating to, Mousehold Heath during the last civic year.
2. This will be the final annual report in this format, future reports will be based on the new management plan objectives.

Budget

3. Each year the conservators are required to determine and approve the budget for Mousehold Heath, and to make a levy on Norwich City Council.
4. Budget reports are brought to their meetings on a regular basis for monitoring purposes.
5. All financial expenditure was within the budget precept, with a managed underspend in the financial year 2018/19 to contribute to building up the financial reserve held as a contingency for emergency situations.

Infrastructure management

Path maintenance.

6. The network of paths across the heath require cutting back to keep them open and accessible. The frequency of cutting depends on the location and the type of vegetation. This work was done throughout the year by the Wardens and with the help of individual volunteers and volunteer groups
7. Gilman Road cycle route/footpath was flailed to open up access and control overhanging vegetation.
8. Work also continued on maintaining the Cavalry Track by cutting back encroaching vegetation and clearing debris from the adjacent gullies.

Seats and benches

9. Benches on the heath are a mixture of ages and conditions. During the year four benches that had been vandalised were repaired and one was removed. A new bench kindly sponsored by the Mousehold Heath Defenders installed at Oak Avenue.
10. Deep holes around benches which could have potentially been trip hazards were filled.
11. Completion of the replacement of a number of sections of wooden hand rails, along with two hardwood posts and boarding on the fire exit stairs, has been undertaken on the Pavilion.

Bollards and gates

12. Bollards across the site are used to prevent unauthorised vehicle access. Damaged bollards were replaced at St James Hill and Britannia Road car park.
13. To secure the vehicle access gate at Hill Farm Track, the supporting post housing the hasp and staple, was strengthened by re setting the concrete footing.
14. Due to high usage, one of the cycle stands at the Pitch and Putt car park was repaired by securing the loose metal cross member and re setting the wooden upright post.
15. All vehicle access gates were fitted with new, No Parking emergency access required at all times, signs fitted, along with the no parking fire access sign at the lane leading up to the pavilion.

Changing rooms

16. Annual programmed electrical and maintenance testing along with routine maintenance of the shower and lighting equipment at the changing rooms was completed.
17. A loose hand rail was also repaired.

Pavilion

18. Emergency repairs were required at the pavilion as a result of the roof leaking into the premises.
19. A condition survey was also commissioned from NPS Norwich of the pavilion and the public toilets to ascertain approximate repair liabilities arising over the next 20 years. This will enable the Conservators to develop a proactive plan for maintenance of the premises, rather than reactive which will enable improved financial planning and more efficient use of resources.
20. The report will be used during the first year of the plan to inform a programme of capital and revenue repairs to be undertaken over the coming years to be considered by the Conservators.
21. As a result of the leaking a roof a meeting was held with the tenants, the conservators and representatives from NPS Norwich. Matters relating to the tenancy and clarity around responsibilities were discussed and steps taken to provide clarification with a revised site plan and variations to the lease to be made and agreed at a future date.
22. All parties found the meeting useful and positive and agreed that developing working together further would be beneficial to them and also the heath.
23. Two Newell posts were replaced and repairs undertaken to secure a riser and tread on the stairwell at the right hand side of the pavilion along with the wooden hand rail on the slope leading up to the pavilion.

Toilets

24. Works at the toilet block were to repair a leaking tap and the removal of a wasps nest.

Car parks

25. Annual car parks maintenance works were undertaken at the Pitch and Putt and Britannia Road public car parks. The car parks are made up of loose fill material which is then compacted. Use by vehicles, heavy rain and frost result in pot holing. The nature of the surface deters vehicles from driving around at high speed but does require annual maintenance.

26. Two Disable parking only signs were replaced at Britannia Road public car park.

27. Due to vehicle encroachment, eighteen existing wooden bollards needed to be re set in concrete and seven new bollards installed at Britannia Road public car park.

Tree safety

28. Tree safety inspections of all well used paths, tracks and car parks, was carried out by the Mousehold wardens on a six monthly basis. An additional survey of all public roads and car parks was also carried out by a Norwich City Council arboricultural officer. The surveys identified 87 dead, dying or dangerous trees, windblown trees and branches adjacent to or blocking paths which require remedial work or removal.

29. Through observations during patrols and following ad hoc reports from members of the community, 20 mainly wind-blown trees had work done to open paths and make branches safe.

30. The majority of the tree work was undertaken by the Mousehold wardens or the wardens in conjunction with volunteers if appropriate. Specialist tree work and an out of hours service for emergencies was delivered by NorwichNorse Environmental.

Management for nature

31. A range of habitat and site management tasks have been carried out by the wardens, volunteers and contractors, to help deliver the management plan objectives relating to habitats. These are detailed in relevant sections below.

Woodland management

32. Work to maintain paths and clear windblown branches, through a section of woodland adjacent to Gilman Road and the Long Valley continued. This work has been carried out to reduce anti-social behaviour and increase community access to a formally impenetrable area, with the aim of improving biodiversity and creating a more diverse environment for fauna and flora to become established.

33. Mustard Pond Glade was cut using brushcutters, rakes and pitch forks to remove old vegetation, to increase the amount of light to encourage wildflower regrowth.

34. Encroaching bracken and scrub was also cut back in other woodland glades to encourage a diversity of plants to grow.

Heathland and Grassland management

35. Lowland heathland is a scarce and threatened habitat and only a sixth of the heathland that was present in England in 1800 now remains. This unique habitat houses all six of our native reptiles, fifty percent of which can be found on Mousehold, including Grass Snake, Slow Worm and Common Lizard.
36. 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.
37. In 2012, Norwich City Council secured - on behalf of the conservators – grant funding from Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS), which provides funding to support heathland management work on the heath to restore and conserve areas of heathland and acid grassland over a 10 year period.
38. Removal of encroaching trees, scrub and bracken from existing heathland areas has been carried out, these works are usually undertaken by volunteers, to fulfil the requirements with the 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.
39. The year had a particularly hot summer and fire proved problematic with over 35 fires breaking out on the heath during the summer period.
40. There were large gorse fires adjacent to the Vinegar Pond. Areas of old and leggy burnt gorse has been cut back, to aid natural regeneration and reduce the visual impact of the burnt material has been cut back and fire breaks created.
41. Following the fires an opportunity was taken to humus strip the burnt areas (almost one hectare in total), to create bare ground to assist with the regeneration of heather. This work helps meet the objectives of the HLS agreement. The removal of the humus layer will also help reduce fire size and risk in future dry years.
42. Encroaching scrub and bracken has been cut back in the HLS areas and removed to conserve heathland and grassland habitats. If the cutting back was not done encroaching vegetation would rapidly out-compete and smother important heathland and grassland plant species.
43. The acid grassland at the Anthills area has been cut with a brushcutter and the arisings removed, to reduce nutrient status and benefit specialist acid grassland plants.
44. A Natural England officer undertook a site visit with the Mousehold wardens, to monitor the progress of the Mousehold Heath HLS Agreement 2012 – 2022. He was pleased with the progress of the project to date, especially the success of the humus stripping, and suggested that the heath could be eligible for another similar Environmental Stewardship agreement in 2022.
45. A 'tree popper' tool for removing saplings has been trialled. The tool has been used to pull up invasive birch saplings. Sapling regrowth will be counted to see how effective

the tool has been and this will help inform a decision on future investment in more tools and their use.

Surveys

Butterflies

46. Two Butterfly Conservation, Butterfly Conservation Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (BMS) transects were surveyed by the wardens, on a weekly basis, between April and October.
47. The BMS is the largest and longest running biological survey in the world (established in 1976). Data is collected from over 1,200 sites in the UK, with 29 sites surveyed in Norfolk.
48. There were 606 butterflies recorded during the survey on the Western side of Gurney Road in 2018 increase of 132 compared with the previous. On the Eastern side transect, a total of 702 butterflies were recorded, an increase of 174 compared with the previous year
49. Both surveys are showing an upward trend in butterfly numbers in the last 15 and 5 years respectively. This is contrary to the county and national trends which are declining. These upward trends on the Mousehold Heath transects suggests that conservation management work to restore early successional habitats, such as heathland, woodland glade and acid grassland, are having a positive effect on butterfly biodiversity.

Moths

50. Six public moth survey evenings, along with ad hoc surveys have been completed during the year. Over 100 moths were recorded during the surveys, including 17 species new to the site (up from 12 last year) bringing the site list up to 251 species. Many colourful and characteristic heathland and woodland species were recorded during the surveys, including an impressive Angle shades and an attractive Ruby tiger.

Birds

51. A Common Bird Census (CBC) survey was carried out by the wardens with the help of volunteers. 31 species of bird were recorded as having breeding territories based on the CBC methodology.
52. Two welcome newcomers to the survey were Common buzzard and Tawney owl which were recorded on the Community Dawn Chorus Survey Walk. There was a general increase in territories during the 2018 nesting season, with Blackbirds, Blackcaps, Long tailed tits, Goldcrests and House sparrows, having a particularly good year. Willow Warblers weren't recorded on the survey (although they were seen in good numbers on the western side of the heath) for the first time, which may have been due to early summer fires in their traditional nesting areas along the transect route.

Bats

53. A new Bat Conservation Trust, National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP), Field Survey was organised and undertaken by the Mousehold wardens, with the help of volunteers, on two evenings in July. The national survey involves the walking of a set transect route, surveying for Common and Soprano Pipistrelle and Noctule Bat species, at 11 designated survey points. 49 Common and Soprano pipistrelle passes were recorded, indicating a number of bats inhabiting the site.
54. A team from the Ecological Consultancy and a Mousehold warden checked and repaired the sites 40 bat boxes which are now 8 years old. Some of the boxes are rotting and there are plans to replace them next year. One bat box was found to be regularly being used by bats. The team, consisting of members with bat handling licence's, used the day as an end of year team building exercise.

Plants

55. A monthly plant survey on St James' Hill was carried out by members of the Mousehold Heath Defenders and wardens .
56. Two further monthly surveys in the New pond/Hawthorn glade area 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.

Bumblebees

57. 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. The transect survey recorded a number of bee species, including Early bumblebee, Buff-tailed bumblebee, White-tailed bumblebee, Red-tailed bumblebee, Tree bumble bee and Common carder bee. The abundance of bee species recoded suggests 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

58. A good number of species have been recorded such as Large red, Common blue, Azure damselflies, along with the Broad-bodied chaser, Red darter and Emperor Dragonflies, with over 100 Migrant hawkers recorded feeding over heathland vegetation in August. Norfolk hawk, which is a nationally threatened and scarce British Red Data Book species, was recorded for the fourth year in succession.

Volunteers

59. Volunteers play an important role in looking after the heath. The contribution they make is invaluable and enables much more to be delivered than would be possible with the budget available.
60. Volunteer involvement also provides an opportunity for the community to become involved with the management of the heath, to increase their understanding of the projects being undertaken, the importance of the heath and to engender a sense of ownership and pride in the space.
61. A total of 5089 volunteer work hours have been contributed to the management of the site in the last year by 20 groups and many individual volunteers. The groups were:

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)
The Assist Trust.
Mousehold Heath Defenders
Mousehold Heath Mousketeers
City College Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme group
George White School students
Norwich High School for Girls
DEVELOP
Talent Match Employment Group
Lion Wood School
Magdalen Gates School students
8th Norwich Sea Scouts
Geological Society of Norfolk
RBS Corporate Group
Natwest Corporate Group
Aviva Corporate Group
17th Sprowston Scout group
The Ecological Consultancy
Ethical Investments Corporate Group
East Coast College group

62. Following a number of damaging fires, the community rallied with many groups and individuals involved with cutting and clearing unsightly burnt gorse stems. Over 90 Students and staff from Norwich High School for Girls spent two Community Environmental Action days clearing burnt vegetation, in hot challenging conditions, to allow regrowth to flourish.
63. The opportunity to work closely with the Friends of Ketts Heights and share equipment and skills across both sides of Ketts Hill was also explored. Subsequently, two joint work parties, supervised by a Mousehold warden, have taken place to conserve and increase biodiversity on Spitalfields open space and improve access to St James Hill. This was viewed as success and will continue in the future.

Events

64. There has been a range of events to increase understanding, involvement and enjoyment of the site that have been organised or hosted on the heath. Events were organised by the Mousehold wardens, Norwich City Council Events team or the Mousehold Heath Defenders and supported by specialist when required.
65. Well in excess of the 1500 recorded people attended. All events were free with places being booked through the tourist information centre.
66. The events covered a range of activities including:
- Moth evenings
 - Dawn chorus walk
 - History walk as part of the Norfolk Heritage Open Day programme
 - Wildlife walk
 - Fungi walk
 - Site management walk
 - Butterfly walk and workshop

Bird identification and ecology workshop
Three brass band concerts were held during the summer
The Mousehold Heath Defenders organised an Armistice ceremony on Armistice Day and an event to mark the winter solstice.
Norwich School cross country running event starting and finishing at Gilman Road Open Space.

Education

67. Local School and Cub groups were heavily involved in environmental play and Environmental education activities..
68. An Environmental Activity Day, involving students from, Mousehold Avenue infants, Parkside, Charles Darwin, Lion Wood, Magdalen Gates and George White School, was held with over 400 pupils participating. The wardens organised and led environmental education activities which included insect identification by sweep netting on the wildflower meadow and surveying species hidden under logs in woodland.
69. ROOTS environmental education activities - reconnect with Nature – took place on the second Sunday in the month which involved young people's stay and play wildlife activities. For children aged 3-11 years organised by Norwich City Council Events and overseen by the wardens.
70. Forest schools ran one session a week on the heath (depending on the weather) with approximately 15-20 pupils on each one.
71. The Mousehold wardens have led 6 guided walks for East Coast College students with seven students attending each walk.

Litter management

72. Litter was picked on a daily basis by NorwichNorse Environmental throughout the year. A member of the Mousehold Defenders also carried out weekly litter picks on a voluntary basis.
73. A number of areas that had previously being used for camping were cleared and the rubbish removed by the wardens.

Misuse and antisocial behaviour

Camping

74. This year saw an increase in the number of people camping on the heath. In total The Mousehold wardens increased the frequency of patrols during the cold to locate homeless people.
75. In total the wardens dealt with 26 people camping on the heath. Six of these claimed to be homeless.

76. The wardens verbally advised people about camping on the heath and it being against the bylaws and they were advised to leave. If the camper claimed to be homeless, the Norwich City Council homeless and rough sleeper coordinator was contacted so that they could make contact with the individuals with regards to potential temporary accommodation.

Fires

77. Due to the extremely hot and long dry summer period, over thirty fires occurred within the open heathland areas across the site, mostly affecting large stands of gorse and small areas of heather.

78. The majority of the fires appeared to have been lit deliberately. The wardens undertook targeted patrols in specific areas, at specific times of the day, working closely with local police officers. Local schools were approached to explain to them seriousness of the act and the impact this has on wildlife, the environment and potentially human life.

79. The Fire Brigade were at times called back to fires that had re-ignited due to spreading underground through a layer of dead organic matter/humus layer build up.

80. A warden met with the watch manager from Sprowston fire station about fire related issues on the heath and to provide keys for access. The warden discussed the current management and proposed future management for the heathland areas including humus stripping and the creation of fire breaks, which were viewed as positive in terms of reducing humus build and creating fire breaks.

Vehicles

81. The Mousehold wardens worked with Norfolk Police and Norwich City Council area management officers, to remove a burnt-out van off the heath and to repair, damaged bollards and clear up paint spillage at Britannia Road car park.

82. Three motorcyclists have been spoken to and asked to leave the site by the Mousehold Wardens. If they persisted in breaking the byelaws, the police were contacted and asked to speak to the participants and deal with the incident.

BMX

83. BMX cycling has been a problem previously and there have been problems this year both on the heath and also just off it at Heathgate.

84. BMX cyclists found on the site were spoken to by the Mousehold wardens when seen during patrols and whilst working on the heath.

85. Generally individuals listened to the advice, acknowledged what they were asked to do and left. On one occasion two people refused to acknowledge that they understood what they were being asked to do and the reasons why, and then rode off.

86. If people did remain and continue the activity the police would be contacted and asked to speak to the participants and deal with the incident.

87. In an effort to deter the activity a number of BMX jumps have been taken down and the hollows filled in.