

Report to Mousehold Heath Conservators
15 January 2021
Report of Parks and open spaces manager
Subject Mousehold Heath management update 1 April 2020 to 15
January 2021

Item

10

Purpose

To consider the update on activities on the heath relating to the delivery of the Mousehold Heath management plan objectives.

Recommendation

To note the content of the report.

Mousehold Heath management plan objectives

The report helps to meet all the Mousehold Heath management plan objectives.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority 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: Catton Grove and Crome

Contact officer

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Background documents

None

Background

Usually a quarterly report provides an update on the work, activities and issues relating to the delivery of the Mousehold Heath management plan objectives, however, as result of Covid 19 restrictions and no meetings held between April and November this report covers the period 1 April 2020 to 15 January 2021.

1. The objectives are:

- A) To ensure Mousehold Heath is a welcoming place for people to visit.
- B) To protect Mousehold Heath and ensure that it is a safe and secure place to visit.
- C) To ensure that Mousehold Heath is clean and well maintained.
- D) To manage Mousehold Heath in a way that has a positive impact on the environment.
- E) To improve habitats and the natural environment for wildlife to enhance the biodiversity of Mousehold Heath.
- F) To safeguard the historic landscape, archaeological features and buildings of Mousehold Heath.
- G) To provide opportunities for local communities to be involved in all aspect of our work.
- H) To promote Mousehold Heath to increase awareness, knowledge, understanding and a sense of pride.

Report

Mousehold Heath during Covid-19 and lockdowns

The start of restrictions coming into force on 23 March 2020 has resulted in this being a particular challenging period. Officers have also had to adapt to new and very different ways of working, to continue to deliver open space services. This was at a time when they open spaces became critical in supporting the health and wellbeing of residents. Guidance from government has been difficult to interpret at times; and ever changing rules and guidance has meant that aside from what is viewed as business as usual, officers have had to deal with the additional Covid related pressures. However, progress has still been made with the delivery of the management plan.

In accordance with government Covid-19 regulations, volunteer, school and college student activities were suspended during both lockdowns.

During the first lockdown, with people told to exercise locally, the site saw a huge increase in visitors, estimated at 5 times as many visitors as normally expected. People who usually drove to the coast or countryside were using the heath, and appreciating more than ever, the positive impact of having a safe and accessible green space on their doorstep.

During this time, the wardens received a plethora of positive feedback about how important and wonderful it was to have such a large, semi-natural area so close to residents homes.

The wardens continued to undertake ecological surveys (it was much easier to record bird song without car and plane sound) and tree safety works, and work switched to issues arising from the increase in visitor numbers. Warden patrols were increased to deal with acts of anti-social behaviour, such as campfires, BBQ's, BMX jump construction, fly-tipping, etc. Extra litter picks were undertaken to remove the increase in litter. With recycling centres closed, over twenty cases of fly-tipping were removed or ordered to be removed by the wardens.

Without volunteer activity, the wardens spent extra time maintaining site infrastructure, such as painting benches, repairing nature trail/Earth Heritage Trail Posts and cleaning interpretation boards. This work was well-received by the Green Flag judge when he visited late in the year.

For many people, the new normal is more locally focused and the heath has continued to see an increased to the number of visitors through the year, even when lockdowns haven't been in place. This year, more than ever, the site has provided the community with space to escape, space to unwind and space to reflect on the events of 2020 and enjoy the natural world in a safe environment.

Objective A: To ensure Mousehold Heath is a welcoming place for people to visit.

AI00/01 GREEN FLAG AWARD

The application for Green Flag status was a successful. Following a desktop assessment and site visit by the judges. The warden's hosted the judges visit, showing them many aspects of the site and its management assisted by the Chair of the Mousehold Heath Conservators, Cllr Marion Maxwell and the Chair of the Mousehold Defenders, Clare Cohen..

Delegated powers

AP60/01 ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME

Decisions that need to be made between meetings can be made under delegated powers, if it is not possible to convene a meeting due to an emergency or, circumstances preventing a meeting from being convened. The director of neighbourhoods and people, the chair and vice-chair of the Mousehold Conservators making decisions on behalf of committee. This would be subject to no increase in total budget provision and after first taking the matter to the management subgroup. Unless an urgent decision was required as was the case with the two applications detailed below for urgent work to the Turners Oak tree and the new trading concession at Britannia Road.

ML00/03 CONCESSION BRITANNIA ROAD (DELEGATED DECISION)

A site meeting was held on Monday 7 December including the Chair, Vice Chair and Mousehold Heath Wardens to meet and introduce themselves to the successful applicant of Sunset Café, the new concession holder for Britannia Road. The position was offered on a twelve month basis with a contract drawn up on our behalf by Norse Property

Services and a starting date of Sunday 20 of December 2020, covering a twelve month period.

This decision was made under delegated powers.

AI30/02 TREE SAFETY INSPECTION (DELEGATED DECISION)

The first six monthly tree safety survey was completed by the wardens, identifying forty-three dead, dying, dangerous trees and branches mostly due to several high winds and adverse weather conditions, requiring work to manage tree safety risk. Most of the works were completed by the Mousehold wardens within three months, with nine specialised works being ordered through our arboricultural team, Norwich Norse Environmental Services.

An early Autumn storm on 25.09.20 created significant damage, with the Mousehold wardens undertaking twelve windblown tree safety jobs following the strong winds. An additional 32 dead, dying, dangerous and windblown trees and branches spotted during patrols and reported by members of the community, have been made safe and cleared by the Mousehold wardens.

Due to the concern regarding the declining health of the Turners Oak tree located in the middle of the pavilion public car park, Gurney Road, a site meeting was held by the Mousehold Heath Wardens and Norwich City Councils Arboricultural Officer to discuss measures to improve the future health of the tree. It was thought that the declining condition of the tree was due to suffocation of the root system caused by compaction of the surrounding soil conditions, restricting air flow to the root system, contributed to by high vehicle use. Improvement works were needed to be ordered as a priority, for specialised contractors to improve soil conditions and secure the future health of the tree.

Recommended works agreed to, included, extending the existing Root Protection Area at the base of the tree, restrict vehicle access around the tree to mitigate soil compaction, air spading within the root protection area to improve air circulation to the root system and improvement of soil conditions within the RPA.

The works were agreed to with a starting date of Monday 22 February over a five day period with a completion date of Friday 26 February.

This decision was made under delegated power.

AT40/01 CONTRACT MONITORING/IMPROVEMENT NORWICH NORSE ENVIRONMENTAL (NNE)

Gilman Road, Mousehold Avenue and Valley Drive footpath-cycle routes have not been regularly swept, this has been reported to NNE and the Area Management Officer for the eastern area, highlighting public health and safety issues regarding the large build-up of leaf litter causing concern.

The areas will be closely monitored by the wardens to ensure there is an improvement in the future.

Objective B: To protect Mousehold Heath and ensure that it is a safe and secure place to visit.

ML60/01 NORFOLK CONSTABULARY

The Mousehold wardens have liaised with Police Officers to uphold the Bylaws and reduce anti-social behaviour.

ML60/02 NORFOLK FIRE AND RESCUE

The Mousehold wardens have liaised with the lead fireman at Sprowston Fire Centre to reduce the risk of fires on the heath.

MP00/01 SITE PRESENCE

Increased patrols were undertaken during the lockdown and summer due to a large increase in visitor numbers. A number of BMX jumps were dismantled and holes filled in by the wardens. The Bylaws have been upheld by the wardens by speaking to people having BBQ's, campfires, building BMX ramps and using metal detectors.

Objective C: To ensure that Mousehold Heath is clean and well maintained.

ME01/01 GATES FENCING AND BARRIERS

One new chain link fencing supporting post was installed and six sections of fencing re secured to supporting posts due to wear and tear at the Fountain Ground sports pitch, Gurney Road.

ME01/02 BOLLARDS

Four new wooden bollards were installed around the perimeter of Britannia Road car park, replacing missing and damaged ones to ensure the security of the site, and another four were installed to protect against illegal parking in an area of woodland adjacent to the driveway on Britannia Road leading to the privately owned flats.

ME02/01 BENCHES/SEATS/PICNIC BENCHES

A number of benches have been maintained by the Mousehold wardens.

ME04/02 LITTER BINS

Graffiti was removed from four litter bins one at Gilman Road and Gurney Road, the others at various locations within the heath, this falls within the grounds maintenance contract provided by Norse Environmental Services, carried out at no cost to the conservators.

ME04/03 FLY TIPPING

Over 20 fly tipping items were removed from Hill Farm Track, Pitch and Putt car parks and other parts of the heath, including garden waste and building materials. Items found are being removed and disposed of through our contractor Norwich Norse Environmental.

ME06/01 FINGER POSTS AND WAYMARKERS

Nature Trail and Earth Heritage trail posts and discs have been maintained and replaced if vandalised or rotten.

ME12/01 REMOVE GRAFFITI

On five separate occasions Graffiti had to be removed from bollards and cycle route signs along Gilman Road also the notice board and welcome to Mousehold Heath sign and historical interpretation panel (adjacent to the Ice Cream concession) on Gurney Road.

ME12/04 CHANGING ROOMS

A new security grill was installed onto the meeting room window of the changing rooms at the Fountain Ground sports pitch to replace vandalised original.

ME41/01 MAINTAIN PATHS and ME41/03 CYCLEWAYS

Gilman Road, Mousehold Avenue and Valley drive main pathways and cycle routes have been overlooked regarding leaf fall removal with concern regarding public health and safety issues this has been reported to our Area management team leader for a resolution.

Over eighteen paths have been maintained by brush cutting and raking vegetation, including those on Gilman Road Open Space and the Wildflower Meadow; Mustard Pond Glade, in front of the Pavilion; St William's Chapel; on St James Hill etc., by the wardens with the help of volunteers, to allow access to and across the site.

ME44/02 CAR PARK SURFACING

Car park maintenance works including levelling of curb level from car park to highway and pot holes filled, undertaken at the lay bye on Gurney Road, due to erosion caused by high vehicle usage.

Graffiti was removed from Cllr David Bradford's bench and two interpretation boards by the wardens. The graffiti was reported through the council's online reporting system and removed the next day, the police were also informed.

Objective E: To improve habitats and the natural environment for wildlife to enhance the biodiversity of Mousehold Heath.

MH04/01 GLADE MANAGEMENT, MAINTAIN

The Wildlife/Mustard Pond glade has been conserved by cutting and raking encroaching vegetation.

MH12/01 MAINTAIN ACID GRASSLAND

The Anthill and Wildflower meadow have been given their Autumn conservation cut by volunteers and the wardens.

MH31/01 SCRUB AND TREE REMOVAL

Invasive scrub and birch trees have been cut and cleared to restore and conserve important heathland habitat in line with the Natural England, Higher Level Stewardship Agreement.

MH39/01 BRACKEN REMOVAL

Large areas of bracken were cut, pulled, raked and removed from heathland, grassland and woodland glade habitats by volunteers and the wardens. This summer task is crucial to conserving nectar rich heather species and complying with the Mousehold Heath HLS Agreement.

MH39//03 COMMON GORSE REMOVAL

Invasive common gorse has been cut and removed from heathland areas to conserve heather, western gorse and other dwarf shrub species.

MH60/01 VINEGAR POND and MH60/02 WILDLIFE/MUSTARD POND

The Vinegar and Mustard Ponds are the only source of water on the heath. These habitats were continually monitored and the invasive plants Reed Sweet-grass and Yellow Flag Iris have been removed from the Vinegar Pond, along with collecting debris from both ponds.

RA12/01 COMMON BIRD CENSUS

A Common Bird Census (CBC) survey was carried out by the wardens in the Spring. 34 species of bird were recorded (singing and/or calling) having breeding territories based on the British Trust for Ornithology (B.T.O.), CBC methodology.

RA42/01 BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION SURVEY

Two, weekly BMS surveys have been undertaken by the wardens. Early indications suggest that it has been another good year for butterfly species on the heath.

RA82/01 ST JAMES' HILL BUMBLEBEE SURVEY

Monthly Bumblebee Conservation Trust surveys have been undertaken by the wardens with the help of a member of the Mousehold Heath Defenders.

RA92/01 NATIONAL BAT MONITORING PROGRAMME

Two Bat Conservation Trust Field Surveys were completed in July by the wardens assisted by volunteers.

RF22/03 ST JAMES' HILL SURVEY

A warden and a member of the Mousehold Heath Defenders carried out a monthly flower survey identifying a number of flower species.

Objective F: To safeguard the historic landscape, archaeological features and buildings of Mousehold Heath.

MC03/01 ST WILLIAM'S CHAPEL - VEGETATION REMOVAL

Invasive bracken and bramble has been cut and removed from chapel paths, banks and viewpoints by The Conservation Volunteers and the Mousehold wardens so that views of the chapel could be viewed from the interpretation board.

MC81/03 CAVALRY TRACK

Under the supervision of a warden, volunteers have cleared vegetation, leaves and other dead vegetation to maintain the track.

Objective G: To provide opportunities for local communities to be involved in all aspect of our work.

Volunteering and Covid-19

Despite volunteer activity suspended during the lockdowns, there has been a large amount of interest in, and volunteer activity out on site, so far this year. The Mousehold wardens liaised with Parks and Open Spaces Officers to produce Covid-19 Risk Assessments and Safe Working Procedure sheets, to create a safe working environment for when volunteer activities could resume.

The wardens have received an unprecedented interest in volunteering by members of the community, some of whom discovered and used the site for the first time during lockdown, along with people who had been furloughed and had more time to volunteer. Due to this demand and a maximum of 6 volunteers per task, an additional nineteen Mousketeer work parties have been organised and lead by the wardens. This extra community support made up for lost time in the lockdowns and has resulted in the Work Plan 2020/21 being implemented on schedule to date.

The volunteer tasks have provided physical and mental health benefits to the volunteers during a challenging and difficult year for many people. The wardens are planning to continue the increased number of volunteer sessions over the coming months.

AT50/01 VOLUNTEERS GENERAL

A large total of 901 volunteer work hours have been contributed to work on the site in the last three quarters by the following groups:

- The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)
- The Assist Trust
- Mousehold Heath Defenders
- Mousehold Heath Mousketeers
- Natwest, RBS and Aviva Corporate Groups
- Good Gym Norwich
- Norwich High School For Girls
- George White School students
- Many individual volunteers from the community.

Volunteering has provided 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.

Objective H: To promote Mousehold Heath to increase awareness, knowledge, understanding and a sense of pride.

MI60/01 EVENTS

A range of events to increase understanding, involvement and enjoyment of the site have been organised or hosted on the heath in the last three quarters:

- Five environmental education activities have now been authorised to take place throughout December after a long break due to Covid19 restrictions through Norwich City Council Events Team and run by ROOTS, to encourage children and adults to reconnect with the natural world through play and outdoor experiences. The activities included, birthday parties (including woodland adventure), stay and play sessions, adult fitness and wellbeing and children's clubs, spoon carving and yoga.
- Enchanted Forest school is a new Forest School environmental education and play group booked to undertake one event in November and four in December booked through our Norwich City Council Events Team.
- An Armistice Day service was recognized by the Mousehold Heath Defenders on Monday 11 November 2020.
A reef was laid at the Airmen's Memorial, Gurney Road, to remember those who gave their lives, especially in recognition of the 5 airmen who were killed there during World War 2.

Plt.Off. Colin Barton RNZAF
Flt.Sgt. James Lemon RCAF
Flt.Sgt. Robert Kater RCAF
Sgt. Donald Carpenter RAFVR
Sgt. Ernest Nightingale DFM RAFVR