

The Heath & Hampstead Society

Heath Vision





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Hampstead Heath in the 21st Century

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THE PRESERVATION of Hampstead Heath as a stretch of natural countryside within London has been the dedicated aim of the Heath and Hampstead Society for more than one hundred years. The Society considers that the intrinsic purpose of the Heath is to provide city-dwellers with a unique place for tranquil enjoyment and contact with nature. From time to time, we need reminding just how valuable is the concept of a rural idyll within one of the world's largest cities. Increasingly many people regard the Heath merely as a convenient open space available for anyone's favourite sports, running and jogging, cycling and skate-boarding, and general leisure activities.

This booklet reflects the Heath and Hampstead Society's thoughts on how to deal with the various pressures and conservation issues for the benefit of everyone who cares about the Heath, now and in the future. It also sets out the more detailed policies we recommend, through our official channels of representation to the Corporation of London – which owns and manages the Heath.





essential purpose of the Heath

HAMPSTEAD HEATH is a unique relic of London's former countryside. The Heath is particularly varied as it not only straddles the Hampstead-Highgate ridge of Bagshot Sand, known as London's 'Northern Heights', but also passes across a strata of Claygate Beds as it descends onto London Clay. Each type of sub-soil has produced its own ecology and many springs arise where water, after draining through the sand, hits the clay. The area thus provides a special combination of varied landscape and wildlife close to the centre of London.

The stretch of countryside surviving within one of the largest urban areas of the world, a *rus in urbe*, provides quiet enjoyment and contact with nature. The Society regards that as the essential purpose of the Heath, a concept far removed from that of an urban park. Formal sports and organised events are peripheral, and acceptable only if they do not conflict with the essential purpose.

woodland management

THOUSANDS of people visit the Heath to escape from buildings, tarmac and traffic. They delight in walking through areas of woodland, enjoying the illusion of being lost in a forest, remote from the city. Leafy glades of contrasting light and shade, created by skilful coppicing, heighten the pleasure.

Good woodland management is the way to achieve that effect, a careful control, balancing planting and replacing trees and shrubs with the equally important thinning and coppicing. The issues, like the woodlands themselves, are complex. Walkers dislike too much scrub and bramble. The fauna, especially birds, benefit from protective cover. Many areas are dense with saplings that require rigorous thinning to enable the best specimens to flourish and grow into well-formed trees and in order to maintain the shrub layer.

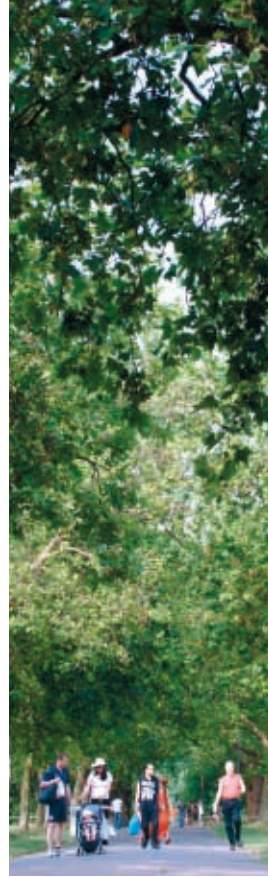


The Society advocates the gradual creation of a mosaic of habitats suitable for the maximum range of flora and fauna, with the addition of a few more glades.

Unfortunately many glades, open grassland and heath have vanished – within living memory – under scrub and secondary woodland, an encroachment that needs to be halted and, in some areas, reversed. Woodland edges provide valuable screening and support a rich and distinctive variety of wildlife; tracts of scrub as large as reasonably possible are preferable to open areas with isolated hawthorn and blackthorn bushes. Therefore a controlled strip of scrub should be left alongside hedges and boundaries, with a woodland edge retained, instead of clearing scrub right back to the trees. Careful management of the woodland edge entails cutting back scrub and brambles, plus uprooting saplings on a rotational basis. About a third needs cutting back each year; and invasive or aggressive species should be controlled to maintain the character of the Heath as a ‘stretch of countryside’. Footpaths need to be kept open and suitable shrubs and wild flowers encouraged.

The lines of ancient oaks along historic boundaries are a major feature of the landscape. There are about 500 of these ancient boundary oaks. Scrub and various species of younger trees are encroaching and a programme for gradual clearing around old trees under specialist supervision to preserve these ancient oaks should be drawn up as soon as possible. Gaps in the lines of boundary oaks should be filled by transplanting suitable oak saplings.

Sycamore and turkey oak saplings should be regarded as forest weeds and eradicated as far as possible. However, as with all mature trees, the sycamores should not be felled without consultation. The birches also need controlling although they have a beneficial role as a nurse for young oaks and for their attraction for redpoll and other birds.





grassland management

THE GRASSLAND needs protection and management, not only to prevent loss through invasion by scrub, brambles and saplings, but to encourage and conserve flora and fauna that depend on it. Priority areas are those with the highest nature conservation interest, such as the dry, acidic grasslands on the upper slopes.

We favour unmown grass – as distinct from short-mown – to encourage the widest variety of wildlife, except in areas such as sports pitches and designated children’s play areas, and for rye grass on clay. Saplings must not be allowed to grow within the long grasses, and bramble must be contained to the woodland edge and not allowed to colonise the grasslands. Flowering grassland meadows in selected spots might be developed; indeed, we should like to see a greater profusion of wild flowers and a greater variety. Footpaths through the long grass areas should be regularly mown to a width of around 1.5m both to encourage use of the paths and to reduce erosion; the edges of wider paths need not be intensively mown.

Mowing cycles should support these aims. Timing will vary by area but most mowing should be left as late in the year as possible with the cuttings left a day or more before removal, to allow mobile invertebrates to crawl or fly away. Cutting regimes should leave, on a rotational basis, around 10% of the larger areas as uncut refuges for invertebrates. Heavy machinery should not be used when the ground is wet and care must be taken to avoid damage to anthills. Gorse and broom, important structural components of acid grassland, require rotational cutting to maintain a dense structure. There should be no increase in the area of intensively mown grassland set aside for recreational purposes on the Heath.

management for wildlife

A MAJOR consideration is to encourage the type of wildlife and habitats appropriate to Middlesex heath and farmland.

Permanent fencing should be kept to a minimum. Temporary fencing is the answer for sensitive areas during the bird-breeding season (March to July) and dead-hedging used to protect coppiced woodland areas until early re-growth is established.

Wet areas in woodlands provide an important habitat for both flora and fauna; therefore it is essential that they are not too heavily shaded, or much of the wildlife within them, including frogs, toads and newts, will decline.

All ponds are nature sanctuaries and whilst dogs should be discouraged from plunging in, particularly when waterfowl are hatching and caring for chicks, it is equally important that the views of, and access to, ponds should not be lost. The proliferation of Canada geese needs to be discouraged. Fish stocks to provide food for grebes and herons should be investigated and maintained.





distinctive views

THERE ARE ten designated Strategic Views of London, three of which are from the Heath. There are several more historic Heath views that need maintaining – some have already been lost – while others are rapidly diminishing. It would be sad to lose such distinctive views simply due to a lack of judicious thinning of the intervening trees. The Heath & Hampstead Society considers that the most important views are:

strategic views

Parliament Hill to St. Paul's Cathedral
Parliament Hill to the Palace of Westminster } see page 19
Kenwood viewing point to St. Paul's Cathedral

distinctive outward views

Whitestone Pond across London
Whitestone Pond to Harrow and to Neasden
Upper Fairground to South East London
Hill Garden pergola to Harrow
Sir Lawrence Chubb shelter to the City
Viaduct to Christchurch steeple
Hill above mixed bathing pond to Christchurch
Parliament Hill to Christchurch steeple
Drying Ground above Sandy Road to Golders Hill Park
Kenwood House Terrace across the Sham Bridge to the City
Kenwood West Meadow to Witanhurst
Grille in Kenwood fence (by Toll House) to Witanhurst and St Michaels

distinctive internal views

Unwin's Hill down to Wylde's
Path by the west side of South Meadow to the Meadow
Beechmount to Kenwood House
Kenwood Dairy to the ponds

conservation of distinctive areas

WE HAVE divided the Heath into six main areas that require specific conservation management.

EAST HEATH

IN THIS publication we define East Heath as the area of the Heath south of Spaniards Road/Hampstead Lane, excluding Kenwood. The landscape here includes open grassland and grassland with many mature trees; woodland and glades; streams and ponds; bird and wildlife sanctuary areas; heathland; views from high ground over grassland and trees; formal recreation areas.

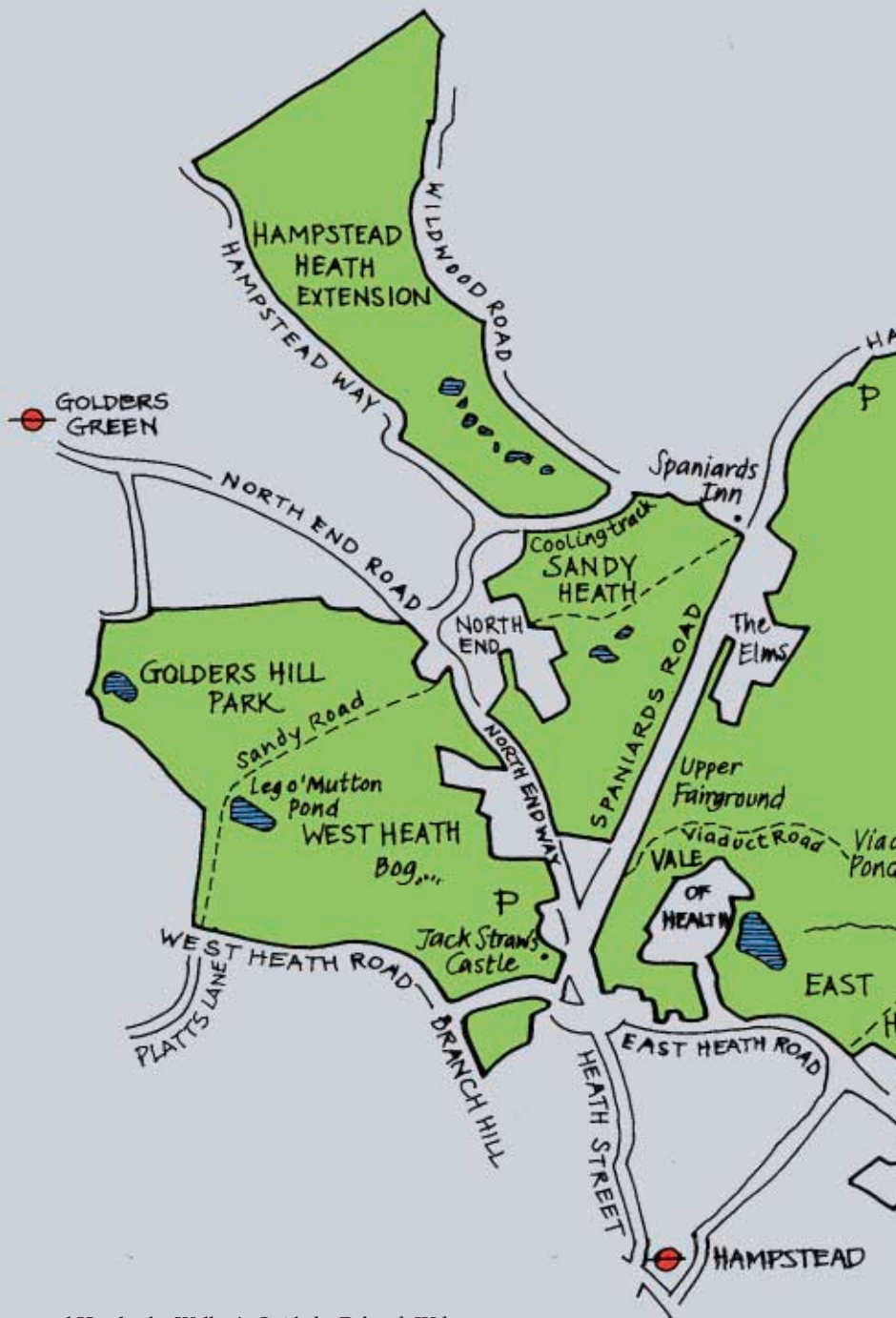
It is important to maintain the variety of landscape, including flora and the wildlife habitat, and to retain the existing area of grassland. Apart from designated recreational areas, the grassland should generally be left rough, though differing management procedures are required for fine-leaved acidic grassland and for less acidic more fertile grassland. In all areas the growth of invasive species, such as bramble needs monitoring and action taken to prevent their spread. All saplings need to be removed from grasslands.

Conservation of the best views from high ground over grassland and between trees is desirable, where necessary trimming the branches of young trees. Typical examples of views in jeopardy are the view south-east from upper South Meadow and the view west from the Viaduct.

The narrow strip of land bordering the south fence of Kenwood is a designated SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and needs careful treatment. We should like to see it developed as a woodland edge obscuring the railings.

The hedges are important historic features and valuable wildlife areas. As such, they need gradual renovation, replanting where necessary, filling gaps not required for access, and removing sycamore saplings. Such a programme would





from: Hampstead Heath, the Walker's Guide by Deborah Wolton



enhance the rural character of the Heath and provide additional cover and food for wildlife.

In the South Meadow, we support gradual thinning of trees, to restore the SSSI status granted in the 1950s.

Judicious removal of trees and shrubs along the stream from the Vale of Health pond would improve access to the crossing points and to one bank.

The two bird sanctuaries upstream of the Viaduct and at Highgate No.4 pond would benefit from regular maintenance to prevent them from becoming dense and overgrown.

At the south end of Parliament Hill Fields the visual impact of the running track and recreational artifacts needs softening by planting trees and shrubs.

WEST HEATH

THE MAIN areas of West Heath should be conserved as woodland with walks through sunlit glades. Small or coppiced trees are required to provide shelter and food for birds and other wildlife; some gradual thinning of trees may be necessary to achieve this end. The rehabilitation of the bog, the creation of an open glade in the adjoining woodland, and the thinning out of trees on the edges of the Leg of Mutton Pond are all much applauded.

The West Heath meadow should be kept as an open space with encroaching scrub cut back each year. The screen of trees along West Heath Road should be maintained with new trees planted as necessary; the same applies to the firs on the two mounds near Golders Hill, an historic feature.

We welcome the measures to conserve and expand gorse and small area of broom below Flagstaff Hill, the healthy growth and expansion of heather in the eastern area and the shrubs and trees planted in the area between Sandy Road and the Golders Hill Park boundary fence. There is scope for more planting here in an area well suited to the



provision of cover and food for wildlife.

The Pergola is attractive and well maintained, with great appeal.

GOLDERS HILL PARK

GOLDERS HILL Park is a good example of an historic garden, well maintained as a delightful park particularly suitable for children and for those who appreciate this feature in contrast to the wildness of the Heath. In this way, it also protects the Heath. We would resist any additional building in the Park.

The walk along the path on the South West boundary of the Park through the more 'rural' area leading to the Swan Pond is pleasant. Some additional plantings of shrubs and small trees may be appropriate. We congratulate the staff on the very attractive water garden created upstream of the Swan Pond.

The Zoo is a great attraction and highly educative. Although we have reservations about keeping animals and birds in captivity, we welcome the major improvements. Visitors should understand that the natural place for all non-domestic animals is in the wild; captivity is only necessary for the welfare of creatures needing specialist help. Educational notices should therefore be placed around cages explaining why each creature is there and a little about its particular history.

SANDY HEATH

SANDY HEATH should be maintained as woodland with walks through grassy glades, with patches of gorse and heather and with groups of shrubs or coppiced trees to provide shelter for wildlife. We strongly approve the opening up of the area around the ponds and the planting of additional gorse and favour the introduction of shrubs such as hawthorn or holly on the fringes of the area. The walks between the ponds and the paddock are pleasant and would benefit from



the planting of additional groups of shrubs and small coppices, as would the fringes of the paddock. The paddock should remain as meadow cut late once a year for hay. It is important to maintain a dense screen between Sandy Heath and the traffic on Spaniards Road.

We welcome the expansion of the area of heather north of the paddock.

The existing stands of larch and Scots pine at Unwin's Hill and Spaniards Green need further conservation work, as well as hedge trimming and coppicing along the Cooling Track. We would like the narrow view of Wyldes from Unwin's Hill to be restored, and to see a conservation plan for Pitt's Garden that includes replanting of trees and shrubs.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH EXTENSION

OVERALL, the Heath Extension should remain a relatively unchanged area of farmland with fields and hedges, where bird life flourishes – a place where grazing beasts and agricultural activities would not surprise the visitor – and with some standard and some coppiced trees on the hedge-line. Except on the playing fields and in the children's enclosure, the grass should be left rough, and cut late for hay once a year, helping to retain the sense of country and promote the growth of wild flowers.

The long thin Pond Field, between the path and the Severn Sisters ponds, should be cleared of the plants deposited there when silt was removed from the ponds, and restored to become a meadow cut for hay. The fence along this field is excessively intrusive; removing it from one or two of the ponds would restore the view of the meadow rolling down to the ponds. We should like to see meadow and hedgerow flora encouraged.

The area between Wildwood Road and the Seven Sisters ponds should be maintained as woodland with a glade at Ikin's corner.



KENWOOD

KENWOOD is an excellent example of an English country estate.

Although the house and immediate grounds are managed separately from the Heath, much of the Heath formed part of the old Kenwood estate and most people regard the two areas as a single whole. Indeed, when the estate was purchased for the public it was done so on the basis that the land was held ‘...as an open space for the benefit of the public for ever by way of addition to or extension of Hampstead Heath...’ and that the land surrounding the house be ‘...well-maintained to preserve the atmosphere of a gentleman’s private park’.

We are pleased with the general success in achieving these objectives; judicial removal of intervening branches and trees would restore the wonderful historic view of the house from Beech Mount. We question the need to restrict well-behaved dogs in the pasture ground and other areas away from the formal gardens and the café.



issues for immediate attention

CYCLING

MAINTAINING the Heath as a stretch of countryside for quiet enjoyment and contact with nature is incompatible with its use by cyclists as a substitute for the local highway network. The introduction of cycle through routes into green open spaces would completely alter the tranquil atmosphere and irresponsible cycling brings danger and anxiety onto those who use the Heath on foot.

We, therefore, strongly resist any more cycle routes. Cycling should be limited to the four existing routes (three on East Heath and one on West Heath) and steps should be taken to enforce this.

CAR PARKING

THERE is good public transport to the Heath; additional car-parking is not necessary. However, the car park behind Jack Straw's Castle should be restored to its full area.

CONTROL OF FOOTPATH EROSION

LOCAL erosion of grassland by walkers should be controlled with appropriate measures such as the drainage of sections of paths that habitually become muddy after rain, protection with temporary timber fencing to allow regeneration, and the planting of shrubs to change desire lines and control the width of pedestrian flow. No additional lengths of tarmac should be laid and there should be no new hoggin footpaths.

DOGS

FURTHER measures should be adopted to deal with the problem of fouling by dogs.

INVASIVE SPECIES

SUFFICIENT resources should be deployed to control invasive or aggressive species such as bramble, Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and Californian brome.

SEATS

THERE are too many benches on East Heath. People wishing to donate a memorial seat should be encouraged instead to sponsor trees – especially the replacement of lost ancient hedgerow trees – where they will not lead to loss of future views.

SEXUAL ACTIVITIES

WE ARE completely against any single interest group whose activities effectively restrict the quiet enjoyment of the general public to all parts of the Heath. Homosexuals currently use the West Heath during the night and day for their activities – at night there are several thousand. This use is starting to spread to several other areas, including the Vale of Health, Cohen's Fields, Millfield Lane and the Men's Pond.

The general public avoid these areas and they are therefore really excluded from much of the Heath. We want to see action taken by the Corporation Constables and by the Police to curtail this type of sexual activity and its resultant offensive dangerous detritus.

management plans

WE SUPPORT the Corporation of London in the development of a Long Term Vision for managing the Heath with Medium Term Area Plans (5 year), and Annual Area Work Plans.

English Heritage has produced such plans for Kenwood – admittedly a much smaller and less diverse area. Excellent highly detailed reports on the management of Woodland and of Grassland, commissioned from Dr Meg Game of the Ecology Unit of the Greater London Authority, have covered some areas of the Heath in great detail. These need to be extended to cover the whole of the Heath.

We would like to see a similar report commissioned on the Management of Ponds and Wetland and the resultant management principles from all three reports encompassed into the Medium Term and the Annual Area Work Plans.

We look forward to a continued and constructive working relationship with the Corporation to develop future Area Management Plans.

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