

HACKNEY MARSH USER GROUP:

ANNUAL REPORT 2005-6

1. Creating and maintaining Tree Nursery and Sensory Garden.

With plants and trees to appeal to all the senses- sight, smell, sound, taste, touch, using recycled materials as far as possible, as a resource for Marsh users and children from local schools. Now have a good water source but no power. Fencing is not secure. Fortnightly sessions (9-11am on 2nd and 4th Friday mornings). 23 sessions: between 2 and 14 people at each session. Total of 152 people. Anne photographed at Tree Nursery for I Love Hackney exhibition at Museum. Trees from the Tree Nursery were used in exhibition about Parks at Hackney Museum.

1.1 Planting and caring for trees.

A total of 31 trees planted, mulched and watered, in front of the depot, in Tree Nursery and orchard. Watering a major task- with a trolley and water bottles and water butt on wheels.

1.2 Tree Holding Bed.

To keep trees until they are planted in their final position. Filled with soil and sand and planted with trees including wild pear, whitebeam, walnut and three large crab apples. Weeded and watered trees.

1.3 Tree Growing Areas.

Growing trees in pots raised from seeds (200) and black poplar cuttings from Wick Woodland (100). Plastic sheet under the pots to retain moisture and deter weeds. Original Tree Nursery area by lock ups: have not made this a priority until we know whether it will be taken for Travellers site.

1.4 Shrubs, bushes and hedges.

To provide under storey, increase wildlife interest and act as windbreak. Hedge round TN thickened up and mulched (with school children). New conservation area under rowan trees planted, watered and mulched by children. Rosebed cared for. Shrubs under fruit trees and on banks.

1.5 Growing seeds and young trees.

Growing young trees to provide stock of local provenance for Marshes and other parks. Repotting as young trees grow. Beds built for acorns. Cuttings from Black poplars in Wick Woodland (2006) put in pots. An area for young trees in the shade of polytunnels, with plastic and capillary matting underneath the pots.

1.6 Sensory Garden

Four new beds: one constructed round sophora tree (bulbs, herbs and wild flowers); two beds of tree trunk with winter flowering plants and other with hardy and summer flowering plants; brick bed with tamarisk and snowberry bushes.

Raised bed: blackcurrants, strawberries, herbs, wild flowers and hollyhock.

Polytunnel bed: heat tolerant plants.

Depot fence: Ivy, honeysuckle and holly.

Mini-beast pile near gate- logs moved by school children.

1.7 Ponds and bog garden.

Two ponds and a bog garden constructed (dug out with JCB) and planted. Fence round both ponds by Youth Offending Team with willow and hazel cut in Wick Woodland.

Two water towers to provide water for the boggy area.

The ponds are home to many dragonflies and in May 2006 to a pair of mallards.

2. Activities at the Tree Nursery and Sensory Garden.

They serve as base for activities. Quiet and safe place for children and volunteers to work. Equipment stored safely in two lock ups. Polytunnels provide shelter to work, space for meetings and for children, to display materials.

2.1 Activities.

Friday October 14th 2005. All day session with volunteers from a government department who planted, watered and mulched over 20 standard trees, weeded and mulched the hedge and tree beds, potted up young oaks, moved zinc tanks, filled containers with soil, and planted ivy along fence.

Sunday November 20th 2005. Potting Up Oaks and Black Poplars with Tree Musketeers. Oaks from acorns planted by school children in 2004 and Black poplars from cuttings taken in Wick Woodland in March 2005. Willows planted to create a tunnel.

Friday February 10th 2006. Lifting Black Poplars. Lower branches of Black poplars in Wick Woodland cut to let in light and encourage the trees to grow upright. The Tree Gang later cut the thicker branches and left them on site for the mini beasts. The cuttings were potted up at Tree Nursery.

February 19th 2006. Making rafts. For the water birds on Lea Navigation. With recycled materials. Rafts put in place on Lea Navigation. Coots nested there.

March 4th 2006. Potting up Black Poplars. About 40 young Black poplar trees,. Several planted along the river bank in Springfield Park.

June 9th 2006. Wick Woodland Tenth Birthday celebration. Photos, leaflet, materials found in Tree Nursery, refreshments and birthday cakes (made by Thomasina and cut by Lesley). Walk round Wick Woodland (12.34 hectares).

2.2 HMUG Meetings.

Five meetings: September 17th 2005; November 11th 2005; January 13th 2006; February 14th 2006 (cancelled because Marsh Manager not available); April 28th 2006 (Cam Mathison (elcrp) and Annie Chipchase (Management Plan) invited. March 3rd 2006. Meeting with LDA and Martin Jones from bdp about Strategy for Hackney Marshes. Argued for new changing rooms as a sustainable building and to include a classroom, space for volunteers, display area. Environmental report due by the end of 2006. Asked for exciting tree planting, to complement the planting undertaken in 1890s, in 1980s and since then. Bdp to produce a document for consultation over the next months.

Anne Woollett and Russell Miller attended meetings of Hackney Parks Forum, and Paul Hodge and Paul Higgins attended AGM. Anne has been co-opted onto the Management Group.

3. Activities on Hackney Marshes.

3.1 Four Tree Planting Sessions.

Sunday November 13th 2005. Kingfisher Wood.

Saturday December 3rd 2005 and February 4th 2006. Jubilee Wood.

Saturday January 14th 2006. Friends Wood.

Filled gaps in woodlands (burned out motorbike and dead trees) with trees (including oaks grown in Tree Nursery) and shrubs to increase cover and food for wildlife. The woodlands are growing well. Signs of foxes, anthills and woodpeckers eating the ants.

3.2 Walks.

Ten walks. TN now the starting point of walks. Map on the HEF website, shelter if it is cold, space for leaflets and photographs, and walkers can to enjoy the Tree Nursery.

Saturday October 15th 2005. Autumn Walk round Marshes.

Sunday January 8th 2006. New Year Walk. First signs of spring, over-wintering water birds, trees on East Marsh under threat from Olympics, Red ash along the Lower Level- probably the second tallest in UK. Motorbike speeding along towpath & met community police officers.

March 12th 2006. Olympics walk with NE London Ramblers. From Stratford High Street to Arena Field, Wick Woodland, East Marsh: loss of open space, high fencing and impact on Lea Navigation path, closure of towpaths during construction of Games, loss of open space and trees on East Marsh.

April 8th 2006. Spring Walk, blossom on trees at front of depot, dead hedge in Wick Woodland, problems for wildlife of impounding the river for Olympics.

May 6th 2006. Dawn Chorus Walk along river (kingfishers nests will be destroyed by Olympics work), Wick Woodland and East Marsh. Breakfast at Dino's in Spitalfields.

June 10th 2006. Wick Woodland and northern part of Olympics site. Front of the depot, Wick Woodland, cycle circuit, allotments, views over River Lea, pond at Bully Point (dragonflies, newts and tadpoles), fruit on prunus, mulberries, rare weeping poplars on East Marsh.

July 23rd 2006. Summer walk. Fruits, berries and butterflies.

August 7th, 15th and 22nd 2006. Bat walks and surveys. Bats along Old River Lea and Lea Navigation.

4. Activities elsewhere in Hackney.

Using equipment stored at the Tree Nursery.

Tree planting Mabley Green. November 25th 2005.

May 18th 2006. Trees mulched and watered on Mabley Green.

February and Marsh 2006. Hedge planting Hackney Downs, London Fields, Clapton Pond.

5. School children visit Hackney Marshes, Wick Woodland and Tree Nursery.

There were 17 visits from Daubeney and Kingsmead Schools. A total of 500 children and over 50 teachers and assistants. Volunteers, helpers and support from Rangers on each occasion.

December 1st 2005, February 7th, February 22nd, February 23rd, and May 9th 2006. Birds and trees, using their senses of sight, hearing, and touch to find out about biodiversity, made a dead hedge, labels for trees, wood pile for minibeasts, planted bulbs, and bushes in new conservation area.

March 14th, 16th and 22nd 2006. Children collected natural materials in Wick Woodland and created sculptures in Tree Nursery.

May 10th, May 23rd, May 25th, June 6th and 8th and July 10th 2006.

Children from Daubeney and Kingsmead Schools celebrated the tenth birthday of Wick Woodland by creating sculptures, identifying trees, games and story telling in the Woodland and in Tree Nursery.

6. Newsletters and leaflets.

To publicise events and activities and encourage people to visit and enjoy the Marshes for a variety of recreational activities.

Six newsletters were circulated by post and email and placed on HEF website (with photos);

Five leaflets: Trees of Hackney Marshes; East Marsh; Wick Woodland; Trees of Mabley Green; Planting trees in Hackney Parks.

Available as printed copies and from website.

Activities advertised on notice boards, libraries and community outlets, and through Hackney Today, Hackney Gazette and Hackney website.

Maps of Hackney Marshes: to guide people to activities; areas on and around Hackney Marshes which are part of the Olympics proposals.

These can all be downloaded. Go to Hackney Marshes.

7. Support from Park staff and others.

The work and activities undertaken in partnership with Parks, especially Manager, Tree Officer, Tree Gang, Rangers and Gardeners at the Marshes. Also community police, Housing (two trees, dustbins, plant pots), Rupert Bentley-Walls and Highways (trees), GWEL and Tree Carers project for watering equipment, bed for plants (Green Team), Dylan Pym (wooden bench), Ted Tuddenham (stool), Daubeney School (tables and chairs), Essex Bottle Group (bottles and stoneware jars).

8. Funding.

HMUG is grateful for funding from a variety of sources to support activities and provide publicity (photos, newsletters).

- Hackney Voluntary Sector Grant.
- Green Gateway.
- Park Life (NRF)
- Actions for Biodiversity (NRF)
- Single Community Programme/ Community Empowerment Network.

HMUG is also grateful to Hackney Environment Forum for the use of its bank account. Insurance cover is provided through BTCV.

9. Issues raised through the year include:

9.1 Olympics and its impact for Hackney Marshes.

London Olympics Bill became law, setting up ODA (Olympics Delivery Authority), giving it planning powers and removing the obligation to provide exchange land for Common Land.

CPO Notices (Compulsory Purchase Orders) included Arena Field, White Hart Field, Morris Field and East Marsh. Public Enquiry May- July 2006.

Electric cables to go underground: work started at Millfields and Eastway, with large piles of spoil at old Greyhound Stadium site, Waterden Road.

Pylons: only two of the three lines will go underground. One of the two pylons at the north end of Marshes will go but the second (which goes north) will remain.

Proposal for Tree Preservation Orders for mature Native Black Poplars on East Marsh submitted.

Surveys: several on the Marshes. Metal tags have appeared on many trees. Not sure who did this.

Map of the sites on www.hackneyenvironment.org.uk

Strategy for Hackney Marshes: to focus on loss of sports provision on East Marsh and also some environmental issues. Does not include Arena Field (sports, open space and wildlife habitats). Position on this now unclear.

A Land Agreement between ODA and Hackney was finalised in July:
Arena Field. This and land (and trees and bushes) between Arena Field and towpath to be lost in 2007. High fence along the towpath (narrow and green-free corridor, loss of open vistas for walkers and people living in Wick Village).
White Hart Field and Morris Field. To be lost in 2007. 10 mature ash trees (1960s) on White Hart Field and valuable for wildlife especially invertebrates.
No exchange land. A commitment to some replacement land sometime after the Games.

East Marsh. To be taken for car and coach park (in current jargon the North Spectator Transport Mall) in 2011 and returned 2013.

Some to go at an earlier (as yet unknown) date for construction of land bridge. Will require the loss of some of sports area and mature ash trees along Ruckholt Road.

Some trees round the edge are under threat. Probably most at risk are the rare weeping poplars.

Fate of pedestrian route from Leyton to Hackney across East Marsh not known.

Environmental Improvements. Funding from the LDA for environmental improvements to compensate for the loss of trees and habitats.

Planning Application. A new planning application will be submitted in early 2007. For more information about the Olympics, map, land agreement and the trees at the front of the Depot go the Olympics pages of this website.

Front of Depot and relocation of the Travellers site.

Not part of the Land Agreement. Still do not know whether the Travellers will take over this area.

Objections to this proposal were submitted to the LDA in terms of loss of Common Land and public open space, and fine collection of specimen trees (including some recently planted by HMUG) and splendid vista at the gateway to Hackney.

Noted that our lock ups, tree bed etc are part of the land under consideration.

LDA (as well as Hackney's Mayor) refuse to acknowledge this.

Issues raised about the future of the Tree Nursery. Will it continue to be a safe and quiet place to work? Doubts about whether schools will want children to visit and the value of continued investment from funders.

9.2 Management Plan for conservation areas of Hackney Marshes.

These include trees and conservation areas round the edges of Marshes, meadow, Lower Level, trees on East Marsh, and Wick Woodland. These areas are designated as Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation.

Annie Chipchase has produced a draft Management Plan which needs to be considered by Users and Management and acted upon.

Brian Wurzel is undertaking a survey of some plants on the Marshes.

9.3 Safety on Marshes.

Concerns about safety relate to a number of threats and to disturbances to people's quiet enjoyment of the Marshes.

Attacks on cyclists. Especially along Sustrans path on the west side of the Marshes and in the early evening. The police presence has increased but the safety of Marsh Users still a major concern.

Motorised vehicles - scooters, miniature motor bikes, quad bikes- disturb the peaceful use of parks and are a risk to the safety of Users. Antisocial hotline:

Users are recommended to report these to the hotline for anti-social behaviour: 0208 356 3030 as well as to Rangers. Vehicles get onto the Marshes through gaps in the fencing. The fencing is being replaced with wooden bollards with chains between the bollards.

Kite buggies and powered model aircraft with huge wing spans. Many Councils now ban these.

Speeding cyclists. Complaints about pedal cyclists speeding along the new Sustrans path. Local cyclists suggest a notice - pedestrians have priority.

Fires: hazard to wildlife and the safety of Marsh Users, in Wick Woodland, Mabley Green, and Main Marsh where a motorbike was burned out.

Notices/ Bylaws: The Manager has put up notices saying that motor vehicles, camping and fires are not permitted. The bylaws need rewriting.

Friends Bridge: is slippery when wet and in frosty weather. A notice has been put up to warn cyclists. It needs a non-slip surface.

Graffiti. A request made to remove the graffiti from Friends Bridge. Graffiti has been removed from East Marsh changing rooms and the back of the Notice Board near Friends Bridge. North Changing Rooms and Friends Bridge still to be done.

Land between Cowbridge and South Millfields. Overgrown. HMUG volunteers have cleared it but want Parks to take it over.

Tow path by Middlesex Filter Beds. The barrier has been removed and dumped by the path.

9.4 Furniture: fencing, benches, notice boards, bike stands.

Broken fencing along Homerton Road.

Fencing round Green Waste area. Cam Mathison agreed to have a fence in place by October 25th. We could then begin to plant a hedge.

Fencing round the Tree Nursery. Poor state- to be replaced.

Benches. More benches requested.

Notice Boards. Six on Marshes and two on Mabley Green. Another one near Cowbridge or Daubeney bridge.

Information Boards on sculptures put in by Groundwork East London.

Bike Racks outside south changing rooms restored.

9.5. Bins and rubbish.

Rubbish continues to be an issue for Users.

Bins and rubbish. Bins round the Marshes often overflowing. One by motorway on Mabley Green seems never to be emptied. Barrels in place- some have gone missing?

Rubbish in Conservation areas: rarely collected: lack of clarity about who is responsible for clearing this rubbish? Insufficient staff to keep the Marshes up to the standard of other parks? How do Marshes compare with other parks?

Dog bins. Long outstanding requests from dog walkers.

9.6 License for Marshes.

Parks have applied for a license for the Marshes. In their response HMUG argued: No event should prevent people having free access to the Marshes.

Control over setting up and packing up events – how long they take, noise levels
Costs of events and clearing up huge amount of rubbish should not be a burden on parks budgets

Park users should be consulted about applications. No notification of any events this summer. Found out from Hackney Gazette about a large and noisy event on Mabley Green on July 15th.

10. Wildlife: some highlights.

HMUG signed up for Breathing Spaces newsletter.

Trees and woodland. These have grown well. Shrubs are being planted to increase the biodiversity value of conservation areas and provide shelter for wildlife.

Black poplars: Hackney has the largest collection of Black Poplar in London. Most of these are on Hackney Marshes and along the River Lea. One of the largest Black Poplars overhanging the River Lea at the north end of Hackney Marshes was cut down by Environment Agency. It has been left on the north bank of the river. Many cuttings have been taken to increase the numbers of these rare trees. There are also six rare weeping poplars on East Marsh which are under threat from the Olympics car and coach park.

Red Ash on Lower Level: the Registrar of Trees visited the Marshes and considers that this to be the second tallest red ash in the UK (and the tallest in England).

Prunus: good year for white blossom on East Marsh bank of the river and in hedge on Homerton Road

Mulberry on East Marsh: good crop of fruit.

Meadow: pyramidal orchid flowered again, and a bee orchid. Several clusters of cowslips. Meadow cut over the winter- need to get the cuttings removed.

North car park: to manage as a conservation area to encourage the tiny versions of plants which grow in this infertile area.

Ponds: lots of insects including many kinds of dragonflies. Thorn apple flowering. House sparrows: colony which live in trees and shrubs at edge of Arena Field about to lose their habitat.

Thrush: nested in tall cypress trees in Tree Nursery and feed on the ground.

Mallards: Pair visited the ponds and Tree Nursery in May.

Teal, tufted duck and gadwall: returned in October and November from their summer homes to Old River Lea for the winter.

Swans: built a nest under A12 but did not raise a family this year.

Bats: walks in August found evidence of pipistrelle bats on Lea Navigation and pipistrelle and noctule bats on Old River Lea.

Butterflies: good year, especially for brimstone and painted lady

Muntjac deer: remains of deer found in Crescent Wood. First evidence of this deer south of Lea Bridge Road.