

HIGHBURY FIELDS TREES

Tree strategy, conservation and management proposals

Highbury Community Association

Highbury Fields Association

FOREWORD

Members of Highbury Community Association and Highbury Fields Association welcome Islington Council's initiative *A Vision for Highbury Fields*. We contributed to the development of the *Vision* and seek to ensure its implementation. We look forward to continuing to work with the Council to improve Highbury Fields.

The two Associations are publishing *Highbury Fields Trees* for a number of reasons. On the one hand this document will be submitted jointly by the two Associations as a contribution to the Council's tree strategy and management plan for Highbury Fields, currently in preparation.

More generally, we intend *Highbury Fields Trees* to be taken into account by the Council, their agents and other bodies whenever they

engage with future projects that affect Highbury Fields.

In addition to this, *Highbury Fields Trees* aims to provide our members with information about the trees on the Fields so as to encourage a full appreciation of their contribution. We hope it will support our members when they put pen to paper in their own responses to the Council's proposals for Highbury Fields.

The Associations are concerned about many aspects of the park but their chief concern is conservation: conservation of the individual trees and, above all, of the nineteenth and early twentieth century landscape design. The vistas of open fields, bound by a series of interlocking avenues of plane trees, are the main feature of this design. While both the park's landscaping

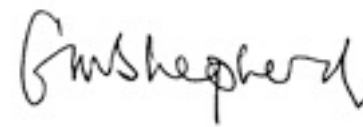
and its tree-stock have suffered some degradation over the years, the most important features remain and flourish.

Those parts that are in poor condition can be rescued, restored and conserved for decades to come.

The Associations would like to see this inheritance looked after and, where feasible, restored for the enjoyment of future generations. There is little need for significant change; rather the challenge is to invest enough care in the trees for the park's heritage landscape to continue into another century. *Highbury Fields Trees* identifies a range of issues and includes a section with key recommendations for securing and improving this much loved park.



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TREEDESIGN

The view from above a 19th century creation

An Act of Parliament in 1885 resulted in Highbury Fields being purchased for “perpetual use by the public for exercise and recreation”. We can still see from this view the original inter-play between open grassland and the formal design of avenues laid out in the early years of the park.



TREE LOCATIONS

Features mentioned in this document

Much of the Associations' proposed tree strategy concerns the Highbury Fields avenue trees as a whole system. The younger trees discussed are to be found widely spread within the park. The plan identifies those specific areas of the park that are referred to by name.



TREEAMENITY



Sun and shade under the plane trees delight for users of the park at all times of day

Hundreds of local people come to the park to enjoy what it offers. Whether it's walking the dog, sunbathing or picnicking, the park brings people into a harmonious relationship with trees and grass, and with the attractive, distantly viewed houses beyond the trees and fields.

This is urban space at its very best.

The quality of light and shade mean a lot for the enjoyment of the park as a place of recreation and contemplation. The planes are superb urban trees offering light, dappled shade in strong sunlight and are never

depressingly dark, whatever the weather, whatever the time of year.

TREECOHESION



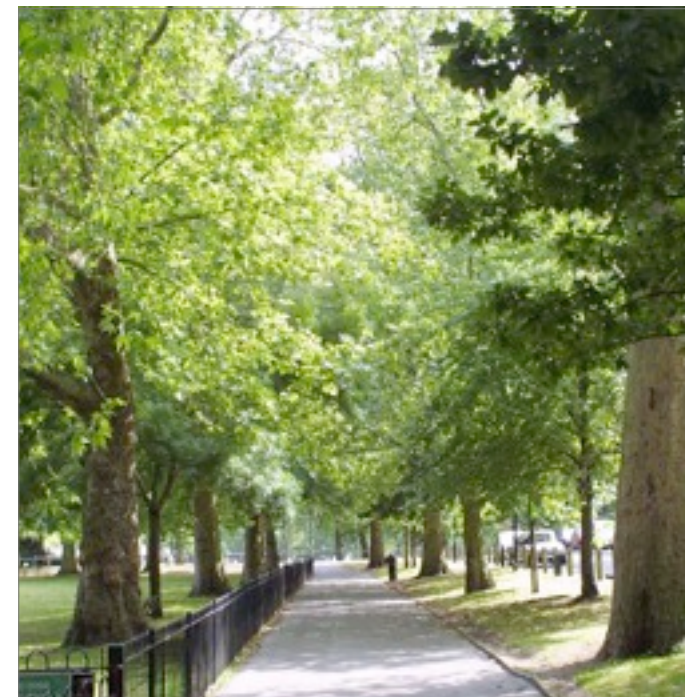
A sense of space greater than the sum of its parts

Despite being Islington's largest park, Highbury Fields is modestly sized. However, its unique design enlarges the sense of space by the skilful use of repetition of the same motif throughout the park, bringing together its otherwise separate sections.

A layout of separate fields is created by a series of interlocking avenues and walkways. These constitute a classic unifying and space-creating use of trees. Whilst the park has the benefit of a gentle slope to the land and a helpful curve along Highbury Crescent, the truly beautiful

quality of its landscaping is the quiet consistency of these avenues: the trees lightly screen the park from the urban environment and shield each field from the next without in any way breaking up the whole.

TREE AVENUES

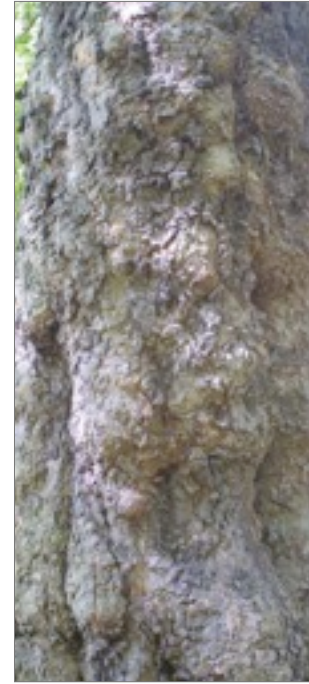
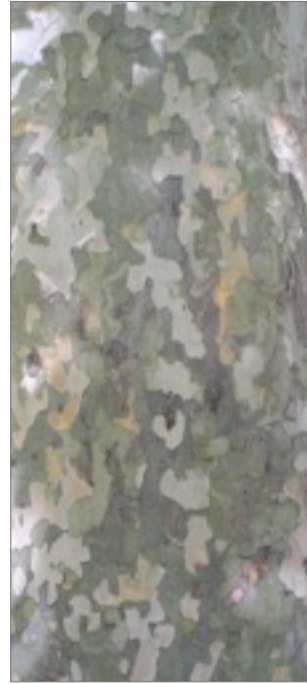
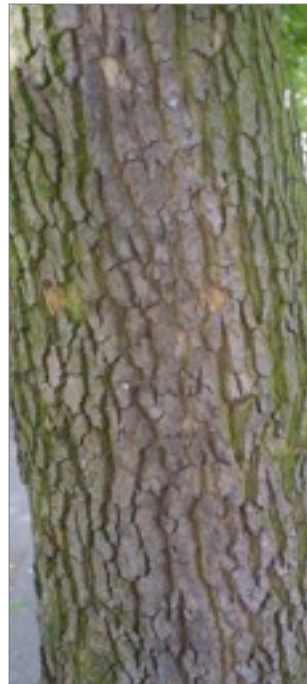


Green naves an avenue of plane trees borders each path

Such interlocking avenues are rare and spectacular in their quietly grand manner. The restrained use of species encourages a focus on the effects of the avenues as a whole. This approach has been rewarded, additionally, by the trees themselves developing personal characteristics that show

variations of strength, tone and colour within the avenues. In all cases the avenue trees are now of such size that the effect is of walking through light naves of sparkling green. The trees are mostly about 120 years old – not yet half way through their lives, all being well.

TREE IDENTITIES



The bark on plane trees varied textures & patterns within the same species

The trees on the Fields provide us with an exceptionally beautiful and interesting experience. A remarkable amount of variety exists amongst the collection of plane trees forming the avenues.

Differences between them can be seen in the bark, the leaves, their fruits

and overall shapes and growth structures. Most interestingly, there are significant botanical differences between many of the planes, making Highbury Fields a site of special interest. As a species, the London plane had many variants and this park is rich in that variety, particularly

along Highbury Crescent and including an unusual pendulous type on Highbury Terrace. There is a good case for propagating from these rarer forms to have a varied stock available for the future, a tree bank to enable easy access to maintain this diversity when new planes are needed.

TREE CHARACTER

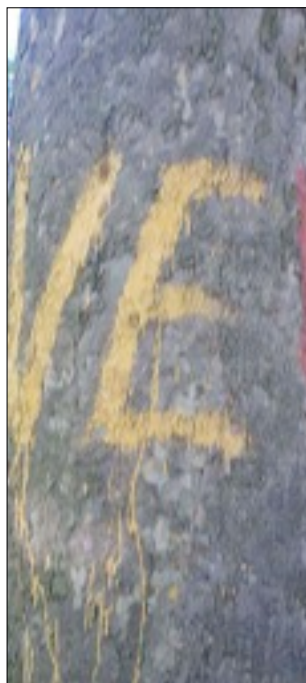


The bark of other trees differences between other species

Other species of tree offer different interest from that offered by the planes. In the pictures above are lime, false acacia, cherry, dawn redwood, horse chestnut and English oak.

There are over thirty species on the Fields with many obviously distinctive forms, shapes and textures.

TREE ABUSE



Graffiti & living notice-boards thoughtless, disfiguring but minor damage

Unfortunately, acts of unkindness to trees take place on Highbury Fields, as in many other places.

Once sprayed with graffiti, it is probably more harmful to the trees to try removing them than to leave time to wear them away.

There are other places to put up

notices than on trees. We would like to see park Rangers active in informing users of the Fields about the acceptable use of notices, perhaps through leaflets, and in removing those inappropriate notices that appear on trees.

TREEDAMAGE



Damage and deformity the causes of serious damage are few

An astonishing, extraordinary 20% of trees on Highbury Fields have suffered damage from either careless use of equipment when cutting grass or from dogs – usually bull terriers – stripping bark from tree trunks. Both types of damage are happening at the time of writing; both are matters of a few

moments of negligence or indifference by grounds staff or owners of dogs; both have an effect on the tree over its whole lifetime, one likely to be shortened by the effect of such decay-inducing assaults. There is no sticking plaster solution to damaged bark which has very little

ability to heal over.

Unguarded grass cutting equipment such as strimmers do the low level damage; dogs usually bite off bark at about one metre high. Inevitably, the tree is then attacked by organisms that induce decay at the site of the injury.

TREEDAMAGE



Young trees are vulnerable many are now irreparably spoiled

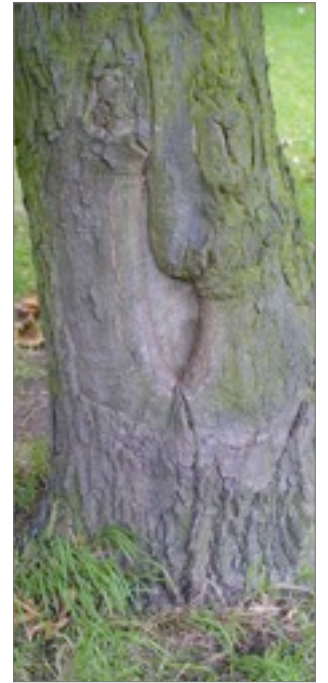
Though a damaged tree will attempt to marshal its own natural defences, such as internally sealing off the wound from the unaffected wood, it is often unable to prevent significant damage. The tree is scarred and becomes deformed. In some cases, removal of the tree is the only course

of action for managing the park. The cost of removal and replacement is significant.

The photographs show some of about 100 instances of damage recorded on Highbury Fields this July. Although they cover many years of damage, it has been noticeable that in

the last year there has been a high incidence of new damage, especially by dogs. This is evident in the Fields, in neighbouring streets and in other parks such as the one being refurbished in Laycock Street, N1.

TREEDAMAGE



Longer term effects different degrees of disfigurement

While it is possible to give adequate protection to trees in the first 2-3 years following planting, it becomes harder as the trees establish themselves. Only the really thick tree trunks are unattractive to dogs, it seems. A tree at thirty or forty years old is still in considerable danger of having its bark

chewed off by a dog.

While the Council's tree officers have suggestions for better protection in the early years, there is no obviously successful, practicable and attractive solution for the ages of 4-40 years. However, given the nature of the problem, it would be unreasonable

to think that any tree planted in the near future could be guaranteed to escape dog damage in its first 40 years of life unless protected.

TREE PROTECTION



Guarding younger trees an unattractive necessity – can we do better?

By placing fencing round their stems, young trees can be protected from dogs stripping off their bark and from strimmers used for cutting grass cutting into the tree at base level.

Strimmers should only be used near trees if they are fitted with suitable guards. With young trees, a

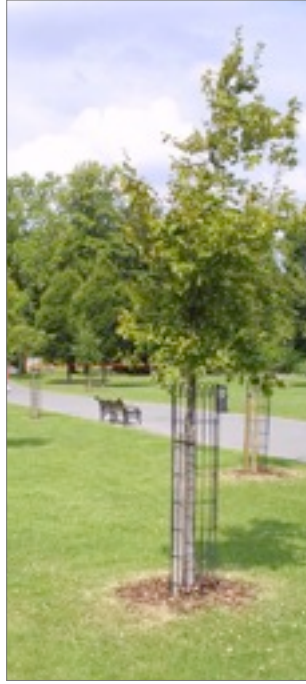
small plastic guard at the base is sufficient against careless use of strimmers but it does not protect against dogs. Wire netting, although ugly and flimsy, appears to have been effective so far in the two examples above. There is a danger that some types of tree guard can be enveloped

by the bark of the growing tree unless guards are maintained loosely around the trunk. The picture on the right shows part of an encircling protective wire mesh now almost completely engulfed by the tree.

TREE PROTECTION



Clissold Park



Clissold Park



Clissold Park



Kew Gardens



Islington Green



Laycock Street

Solutions for preventing damage structures providing different levels of protection

A recent form of guard, a clip-together, plastic-coated wire mesh system, can be seen around several newly-planted trees in Clissold Park. It may be more visually acceptable – though it is slightly more obtrusive – than a simple wrapping of strong wire mesh which is effective, discreet but

not very attractive. These types of guard will become less obvious within a few years as the trees grow.

Lightweight plastic netting protects many small trees in Kew Gardens. Heavy wooden staking is not intended as a permanent support on Islington Green but does prevent

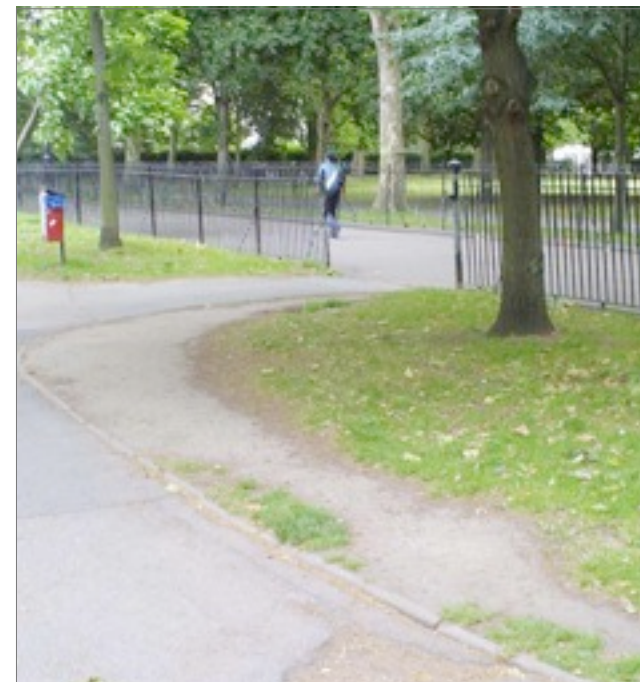
damage by grass cutting machines and perhaps deters dogs from attacking the young trees.

One tree in the park alongside Laycock Street, N1 is protected by a basic ironwork enclosure, substantially sized, that permits the tree to expand over many years.

TREE PROTECTION



St. Mary Magdalene Gardens



Fencing against vehicle damage safeguarding roots of trees

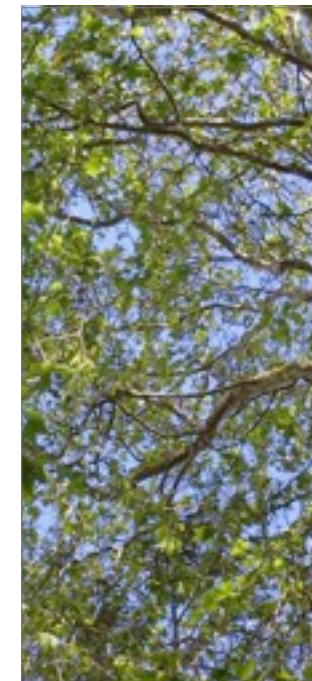
The dead horse chestnut at the end of Highbury Terrace lost some protection with the collapse of the pavement railings but even before that its surface roots were very worn away from being driven over regularly by vehicles accessing the park.

A tree's root system is most

susceptible to damage: many of a tree's roots are at or near the surface and extend as far as the tree's foliage extends. There is reason to protect roots, especially as more and more vehicles appear to have permission to use the pathways. The use of fewer vehicles should be encouraged.

Before any further planting, and to protect existing trees where vehicles habitually drive on the grass, we recommend the installation of neat and effective low fencing such as the short strip protecting the grass from vehicles using the depot in St. Mary Magdalene gardens.

TREECROWNS



**The foliage of plane trees is not dark and dense
but trees experiencing stress have fewer leaves**

For the most part, all the trees on the Fields are growing well, damage aside. However, in a few cases the foliage is not quite as dense as it might be, suggesting those trees are under some form of stress, be it lack of water or nutrients, compaction of the soil, too much salt, or just poor soil.

Each year, in spring, the planes are attacked by anthracnose, a fungal growth that causes some browning and dropping of leaves, but this is common throughout London and elsewhere and the trees all seem to recover and produce a second crop of leaves. However, we would like to see

those with fewer leaves than is desirable investigated and whatever action is needed taken to support more vigorous growth.

TREECONDITIONING



Simulation



Simulation

Enhancing the condition of the soil grass or mulch around the trees

Some avenue trees, for example several along the outer row on Highbury Crescent, seem to need nutritional support and an improvement of their soil conditions.

We would like the tarmac taken up and grass grown between the pavement and a narrower pathway, as

at the top end of the crescent, so introducing more rain water to the soil. Alternatively, composted mulch could also introduce more water and help the soil. Either change would benefit the trees, the mulch being less manageable and grass more environmentally beneficial.

Most trees growing on the grass seem to be flourishing. If there were a proposal to mulch around these trees, we would want to see proof of the benefits that were anticipated. Grass growing up to the tree trunks is so much more user-friendly and attractive than a surround of mulch.

TREESPACING



Percy Circus

New trees planted with old mature trees need a lot of space

The oak above was planted too closely under an existing, large plane and, consequently, its leader and main limbs are all growing nearly horizontally towards the light.

Any young tree planted in a gap between two mature trees needs room to grow to full size and requires a

larger space than might be expected.

The Raywood ash, above, is already hemmed in by mature trees that still need space for expansion of their own. Now, after thirty years, many younger trees on the Fields are beginning to impede mature avenue trees. Some have simply grown too

large and the time has come to remove them to create space for the planes to develop.

In Percy Circus, WC1, it is clear just how much room is needed. In this case, the gap created by the removal of two mature trees was big enough for only one replacement planting.

TREEPLANTING



Simulation

Fill large gaps in avenues with new planes sustaining the overall design of the park

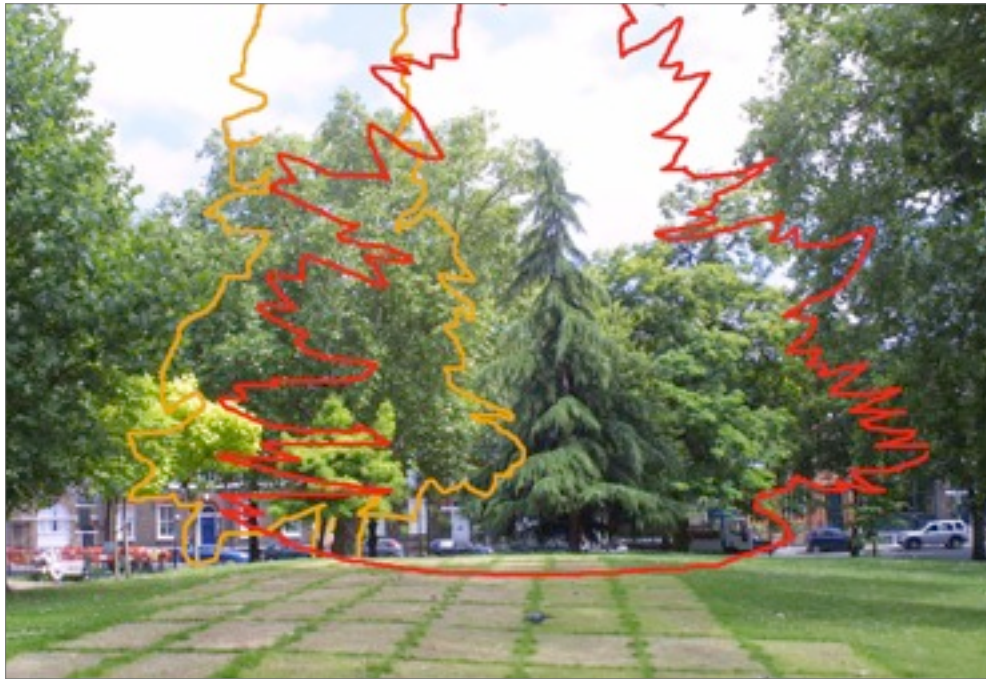
A large, new plane tree should be planted in the prime position at the top of the Mother Field in front of the Ranger's office – a building we hope and expect will be demolished, as suggested in the *Vision*. The tree would not be as big as it is shown in the centre of this photo simulation

above, but over time it would provide a link between the two sides of the field, especially if the building does come down. Eventually, the tree would grow to this size; the simulation shows a single tree will fill the gap.

Other opportunities for planting planes exist alongside Church Path

and Highbury Terrace where the avenues have suffered gaps. We support the landscape designers' and arboriculturists' advice that the avenues should be replanted with the same species because the design of Highbury Fields as a whole is dependent on this concept.

TREE OVERCROWDING



Dawn Redwood, Kew Gardens



Deodar Cedar, Kew Gardens

There can be too many trees time to reduce their numbers throughout the Fields

With its many young trees, the Fields could soon develop into woodland with far less by way of open, grassy spaces. The Mound, for example, an area frequented at lunchtime by local workers, has a dawn redwood and a deodar cedar – indicated above at full size – plus five other young trees

nearby, and the mature trees surrounding them.

The Orchard has a giant sequoia, the largest living species on earth. Nearby is a recently planted sweet chestnut, itself a very large-area species, not to mention the horse chestnuts, hornbeams, oaks and

maples. Even if thinned, the Orchard would retain some very large trees. Planting in the Meadow area, too, is beginning to threaten its open space.

A balance must be re-established. There is a strong case for removing trees in some locations instead of planting more.

TREE OVERCROWDING



Densely packed trees gloomy spaces that are little used

The part of Highbury Fields known as the Orchard consists of two areas of quite densely planted trees north and south of the tennis courts. It's not an orchard, of course, as there are no fruit trees except for a couple of crab-apples, and the south area has been suggested as a spot for a garden and

pond. Many of the trees in these areas are not doing well, with dying branches, thin leaf cover, damaged bark and poor forms.

This year, in the north area, it was discovered that a large sycamore had rotted and it was felled, creating a clearing and making it a spot now

frequented in the sunny weather.

The *Vision* anticipates the removal of selected trees – it seems a good idea to start with those that are failing or badly damaged – to create more open space in these areas and give the remaining trees a better chance of growing to maturity.

TREEPLANTING



Emirates Stadium



Arsenal's new row of plane trees difficult to do well, and a great success

The Council's practice of planting significant numbers of trees is laudable but, by failing properly to deliver a programme of aftercare, the results are less than happy in many cases on Highbury Fields.

Arsenal planted a row of London planes outside the Emirates stadium

in the hottest of summer weather just before its opening. In the same month very similarly sized London planes were planted outside Barclay's Bank, at the entrance to Highbury Fields. The intentions were much the same: to create an entrance both inviting and giving a sense of place. The

difference two years later is testimony to the need for close attention to planning and to care after planting.

The plane trees outside Barclay's Bank are deformed through drought and will need skilful attention to rescue their shapes from being compromised by wayward growth.

TREE ENCOURAGEMENT



Young trees die back without enough water the next year's growth is badly shaped

Several young trees have only just survived a lack of water over recent years. Others have died. It is essential that proper provision is made for suitable care following planting, particularly regular watering. The management regime should also ensure that the trees not only survive,

but grow into well-shaped, mature specimens. It is better from the climate change as well as from the aesthetic point of view to plant fewer trees of good stock, and to cost in and deliver several years of suitable aftercare so that young trees become well established and start to grow well.

The alternative – poor initial care and a higher damage and death rate – will contribute neither to carbon storage nor to the beauty of the park.

In relation to climate change and support for trees, as technology develops we suggest exploring how to capture rain water that runs off the park.

TREE EXPERIENCES



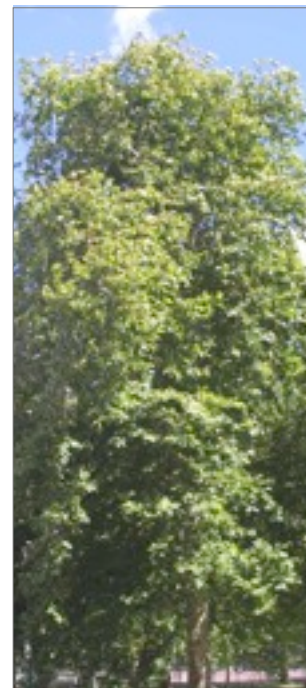
Growing up with trees in touch with nature

Highbury Fields offers play facilities that bring children of all ages into contact with trees. An unusual feature for the youngest is the delightful and suitably small-scale willow tunnel in the Under-Fives Club space. It is the epitome of informality and it is now sprouting vigorously.

The large and superbly set-out playground at the southern end of the Fields is ringed with large trees and bushes that screen children from the urban environment, creating specially for them a sense of place, giving light shade in sunny weather and, with all Highbury Fields' other trees,

significantly improving the quality of the air. The trees may be the first introduction our children have to the concept of a green lung. Here our urban children may have their first taste of the countryside.

TREEPRUNING



Intervention in natural growth pruning ranges in severity and purpose

Luckily, no plane tree on Highbury Fields has to be pruned as radically as are many street trees such as the one shown here from Holloway Road, but some lime trees on Highbury Place are severely pruned, trunks stripped of branches, tops reduced to a few twigs.

The trees lining the pathway

along the back gardens of Highbury Hill are also heavily pruned, creating the blob and stick form of lollipops.

The lime trees along Highbury Place require almost yearly pruning of the shoots springing directly from the lower parts of their trunks.

Fortunately, the plane trees on the

Fields are lofty and well formed. Their pruning has been relatively light and none has been trimmed at the top of its crown. From within the avenues, nave-like vistas open up. Future pruning needs to be carefully calculated to maintain these overarching forms.

TREEMATURITY



The oldest trees resilient and irrepressible

Older trees contribute more to the environment than young ones. It is when trees approach maturity, long before they are ancient or veteran, that they start developing added interest such as bigger crowns, more fascinating shapes, deeply fissured bark and an overall feeling of

marvellous, individual character. Partly, also, this comes about because of the holes which develop in older trees and which extend biodiversity; the trees become home to other organisms such as fungi, beetles, flies, lichens, mosses, and small animals.

We should do everything possible

to promote the older trees and explore ways of increasing their longevity.

Examples of species of interest on account of age on Highbury Fields include many of the planes, horse chestnuts and lime trees.

TREEREMOVAL



Trees at the end of their lives taking down dead and dying trees

All young trees experience some difficulty, and need some luck to become established. Some of the smaller ones above, have either failed or almost failed. Extreme lack of water to the small ball that is their root system for 2-5 years after planting, prevents sufficient growth

into the surrounding soil in order to access water. This seems to be the main cause of their dying.

It has been very rare for trees to be blown down by high wind, though this happened to a quite young elm on Highbury Crescent earlier this year.

But at some point a tree will die

and it then needs to be removed. There are several dead trees still standing on Highbury Fields. Those which are positioned within the formal design of the park should be taken down and, in most cases, be replanted with planes.

TREESTUMPS



Clissold Park

The end a habitat for other lives

The stump of a sycamore in the Orchard is still of use; the tree was felled earlier this year upon discovery that it was hollow and a potential danger.

In the background is a young Wellingtonia, or giant sequoia. The tallest examples of these in the British

Isles are over 53 metres (175 ft) high, a growth rate of over 1m (3 ft) a year. The tallest in the world is over 30m (100 ft) higher still. The larger plane trees on Highbury Fields are about 23m (75 ft) high.

Perhaps, in cases where dead or dying trees are cut down, they can be

laid somewhere nearby to decay. As wood decomposes, insects take advantage of it. We need to strike a balance between maintaining the clarity of the park's design and supplementing its ability to sustain a variety of insect, bird and small animal life.

TREERECOMMENDATIONS

1. OVERALL DESIGN: LAYOUT AND SPECIES CHOICE

The tree strategy for Highbury Fields should balance the avenues and other trees with the open grassy areas, to retain the open field and field boundary mosaics which give the area its charm and support both active and more contemplative forms of recreation.

The plane trees, which form the network of interlocking avenues, should be sustained and maintained as a coherent group.

Therefore, a strategy of selective felling and replanting of existing healthy plane trees must not be adopted.

The design of these formal avenues is not suitable for conversion to a wide variety of tree species; the integrity of the plane tree avenues is an essential characteristic of Highbury Fields and creates its sense of place.

We support the *Vision's* aim to plant planes in existing avenue gaps that have enough room for their expansion into maturity, and the current single-species layout of the avenues.

Gaps to be filled are in Highbury Crescent; Highbury Terrace; western side of Church Path, Highbury Crescent end; Queen's Walk, Highbury Place end; at the edge of the Mound area; on the site of the Ranger's office, if removed.

We support the planting of planes in any future avenue gaps if a plane has to be removed. We reject any suggestion that such gaps should be filled with other species. This would not only spoil the effect of the avenues; it would also provide no kind of solution should a catastrophe occur to wipe out the planes.

Engage a consultant specialist in plane trees to record the types and locations of the variants of London and other planes on Highbury Fields.

Set up a scheme to support the diversity of the plane trees. Investigate the possibility of propagating from the rarer variants of the London plane, of which Highbury Fields has a special collection, so that a varied stock of original trees is available for new planting when necessary.

2. CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

London plane trees have successfully endured the high pollution levels in London of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and have proved themselves to be the hardiest and most good-tempered of city trees. We do not know what will happen in the future, but if Highbury Fields plane trees end up suffering from climate change, so will all the planes in London: we cannot justify experimentation with other species here just on these grounds.

TREERECOMMENDATIONS

However, there are two climate-change-related sets of actions that need to be taken.

First, when gaps need filling, they should be planted with other plane varieties, taking note of the plane tree-consultant's recommendations.

Secondly, the Highbury Fields' planes (and all its other trees) need more intensive care, on the assumption that they are under more water and temperature stress than they were in the past.

Such measures should include more active protection through:

- (i) Watering young trees in dry periods more frequently than at present and for 3-5 years from planting until root systems are well established.
- (ii) Pruning trees as lightly as possible to avoid multiple pruning wounds – avoiding crown lifting and avoiding crown reduction.
- (iii) Guarding existing and new trees against dogs and grass cutting equipment such as strimmers.
- (iv) Repairing fencing to prevent vehicles driving over tree roots and installing additional fencing for root protection where required.

(v) Enforcing a tree work and park maintenance code of practice to the standards in BS3998, *Recommendations for Tree work*.

(vi) Establishing policy and practice norms with ground staff that increase their understanding of trees and reduce accidental harm to trees; imposing a range of substantial financial penalties on contractors for damage resulting from their activities.

(vii) Taking measures to decrease soil compaction on the Fields, at the same time ensuring adequate access to water for trees.

(viii) Avoiding damage to trees from inappropriate chemicals and protecting them from road works and from salt put on the roads in cold weather.

(ix) Regular clearance of leaves, especially in autumn, to maintain hygiene and counter otherwise harmful micro-organisms and to improve the grass.

(x) Taking up tarmac between trees along Highbury Crescent and replacing with a strip of grass, (comparable with that near the Ranger's office), to improve water infiltration to the trees. This would also increase the area of grass and enhance the visual appearance of the park.

TREERECOMMENDATIONS

(xi) If considering mulching trees at present surrounded by grass, monitor the benefits of mulching on previously created test areas.

xii) Exploring ways of storing rain water that runs off the park to service trees of all ages.

3. OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES

Maintain an accurate survey plan of the trees and place a plan of the trees, including species identification, on the Council's website. In addition, many people would enjoy studying such a document if it were placed on a durable board somewhere around the periphery of the Fields.

Retain the existing healthy lime trees in Highbury Place and fill gaps, where appropriate, with new lime trees.

Recognise, in the future planting scheme for Highbury Fields, that trees will grow and should be given adequate room to reach maturity.

Remove very badly damaged trees and replace if appropriate, in line with guidelines set out here.

Fell dead trees, using some of the dead wood as habitat where appropriate.

Make it a presumption that trees that are taken down will not be replaced – other than for planes in the avenues – so as to reduce overcrowding.

Place a moratorium on any tree planting on new ground, including memorial trees, for the preservation of open space and to ensure the values of the existing landscaping are not reduced.

Develop new guidelines for those wishing to place memorials on the fields, (such as suggesting benches, or a contribution to the planting of replacement plane trees).

Reduce overcrowding in the Orchard, allowing the possibility of a garden and more usable open space.

Reduce overcrowding on the Mound to maintain open space.

Remove infill trees of other species in avenues which impede the continuing growth of the plane trees, including the oaks along Queen's Walk which destroy the magic of the circle of mature planes at the centre of the path.

4. TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION WITH THE USERS OF Highbury Fields

Create and advertise lines of communication between the

TREERECOMMENDATIONS

Council and local people concerning trees on the Fields: both formal, annual procedures and contact details for the reporting of problems as they arise.

Establish the proposed Management Group of park users and council officers to support the trees on Highbury Fields.

Actively involve Highbury Community Association and Highbury Fields Association (who have jointly produced this document) in this Group and in the development of any proposals, schemes of work for and monitoring reports of the Fields.

5. MAKE USE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Make this document a part of background information presented to arboricultural and landscape design consultants and to other agents and bodies engaged on work for Highbury Fields.