

**Council, 15 July 2015**

**Agenda Item 9: Question on behalf of the Residents' Group in response to report of an Executive Decision**

**Question**

Whilst the long overdue investment into Harrow Lodge Park is very welcome, would the Cabinet Member reassure this council that the investment will focus its priority spend and action on ensuring the health and wellbeing of both the public and the park's wildlife, the latter of which again recently suffered significant loss following the lake being contaminated. Furthermore, would the Cabinet Member confirm in writing to all members, a full timetable of what actions will be taken and by when, including actions to be taken by third parties such as Thames Water.

**Response**

The Council is in the middle of a long term investment programme to improve parks and open spaces in the borough. The Council currently has 9 Green Flag parks and is intending to secure this status for a further 4 parks in the next two years, including Harrow Lodge Park. This investment forms part of an overall programme to make residents feel more proud of the borough they live in.

Unfortunately there has been a recent loss of wildlife in the two lakes in Harrow Lodge Park, The Environment Agency (EA) have confirmed that the loss of fish was caused by lack of oxygen in the water, caused by a storm surge in the River Ravensbourne, the river that runs through the park. The EA have advised the Council that similar problems occurred in several lakes around the country and there is no evidence to indicate that the recent problems were caused by contamination or pollution in the lakes.

The recent surge in the water also resulted in the bacteria containing botulism being reactivated, resulting in some deaths of birds, although on a smaller scale than similar incidents in the past.

The Council has taken action to improve the level of oxygen in the two lakes in the past year. The dredging and removal of a large amount of silt in one of the lakes has recently been completed and the dredging of a second lake is planned as part of the investment that will be made to secure Green Flag status by July 2017. The Council is also looking in to the option of repairing the Pump House to prevent as much silt entering the lakes as possible. In addition the Council is intending to install three more aerators, in the next couple of months, to further increase the level of oxygen in the lakes. It is hoped that these actions will reduce the risk of further loss of wildlife in the future.

The Council has faced separate problems in relation to sewerage occasionally entering the park. The management of the sewerage and drain water, which runs through the park in underground pipes, is the responsibility of Thames Water (TW), not the Council. Unfortunately, in periods of very high rainfall, sewerage is forced out of the pipes and into the park, through a number of drain covers. Thames Water

have a track record of effectively dealing with these issues very quickly and, earlier in the year, they advised the Council that they had cleared the pipes that run through the park to prevent blockages (following representations by the Council). However, the Council is not happy about the current state of affairs and is looking for a long term solution to the problem.

Council officers recently met with representatives of the EA and TW to discuss what actions could be taken by TW to improve the situation. At that meeting TW agreed to undertake a further study, to see what improvements could be made. This study is due to be provided to the Council ahead of a second meeting that is planned for September 2015. The Council is aware that TW will be required to spend several million pounds to completely resolve the problem (a figure of £10m plus has previously been referred to). The Council is also aware of its position in legal terms, having secured Counsel's opinion on the issues that need to be addressed. The Council's position will be considered further after the September meeting, in the light of the legal advice that has been received and it is not possible to comment further on this matter at this point in time.

The above actions form part of an overall action plan to deliver investment in to Harrow Lodge Park. Other works that will be progressed in the next year include setting up a Friends Group (the first meeting is planned on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2015); re landscaping the area around the lake that has just been dredged; completing improvement works to the café; re opening the public toilets (to be managed by the café operator); improving the "parks furniture" (benches, signs, bins, gates and boundary features); removing redundant features (eg old railings no longer serving a useful purpose); providing new and improved pathways; improving sports and play facilities; improving car parking surfaces; undertaking various tree and scrub clearance works; landscaping works and new planting.