

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD
Monday, 10 July 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Natural Environment Board held at Committee Room -
2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 10 July 2023 at 10.00 am

Present

Members:

Caroline Haines (Chair)
Andrew McMurtrie (Deputy Chairman)
James St John Davis
Deputy Graeme Doshi-Smith
Alderman Ian David Luder
Wendy Mead
Oliver Sells KC
William Upton KC (Ex-Officio Member)

In attendance:

Benjamin Murphy

Officers:

Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Neil Chambers	- Chamberlain's Department
Simon Glynn	- Environment Department
Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Elisabeth Hannah	- Environment Department
Stefania Horne	- Environment Department
Joe Kingston	- Environment Department
Jack Joslin	- Bridge House Estates
Ian Hughes	- Environment Department
Amba Nkundo	- Environment Department
Julia Pridham	- Bridge House Estates
Blair Stringman	- Town Clerk's Department
Jake Tibbets	- Environment Department
Edward Wood	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Benjamin Murphy.

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no declarations of interest.

3. ORDER OF THE COURT OF COMMON COUNCIL

The board received the order of the Court of Common Council held at the Guildhall of the City of London on Thursday 27th April 2023, which appointed the board and approved its Terms of Reference.

Members were provided, upon arrival, with a corrected version to the Court Order. Noting that James Bromiley-Davis took the vacancy left by Catherine McGuinness and has therefore replaced her on the revised Membership.

RESOLVED – To note the Order of the Court.

4. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

The board considered the report to elect a Chairman in accordance with Standing Order No. 29.

The board received an expression of interest from Caroline Haines to be elected as Chairman of the board.

RESOLVED – That, Caroline Haines be elected as Chairman of the Natural Environment Board for the ensuing year.

5. **ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN**

The board considered the report to elect a Deputy Chairman in accordance with Standing Order No. 30.

The board received an expression of interest from Andrew McMurtrie to be elected as Deputy Chairman of the board.

RESOLVED – That, Andrew McMurtrie be declared Deputy Chairman of the board for the ensuing year.

6. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That the public minutes and non-public summary of the previous meeting held on 13 February 2023, be approved as an accurate record.

MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman informed the board that following the completion of the Charity Review, a new Terms of Reference would be produced for the board to approve. Members were told that this would not stop the board in firming up on its strategic review which the Director of Natural Environment would be leading on.

Members were provided with an update on Finsbury Circus. Officers noted that the schedule of the project was on time and a contractor had successfully been appointed. The board were informed that works were due to begin on site in autumn near October/November of this year, it was noted that there were no significant delays at present.

7. **APPOINTMENT OF A REPRESENTATIVE TO THE STREETS AND WALKWAYS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The board considered the invitation to appoint one Member as a Natural Environment Board representative on the Streets and Walkways Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED – That Oliver Sells KC, be appointed as a Natural Environment Board representative on the Streets and Walkways Committee.

8. **FORMAL THANKS TO ALDERMAN IAN LUDER**

The Chairman provided a formal thanks to Alderman Ian Luder for his service and contribution to the board.

I would like to record our sincere thanks and gratitude to Alderman Ian Luder, who is today attending his last meeting of NEB and WHP.

Alderman Ian Luder has, for a period spanning over 10 years, demonstrated the utmost dedication to the City of London Corporation's various Open Spaces committees, now the Natural Environment. He joined the (then) OSCGC in 2014 and in the following years served as Chairman of both OSCG and WHP.

Alderman Luder has also served on the other Natural Environment Committees: Epping Forest and Commons; and Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park. Beyond this, Alderman Luder also featured on the Open Spaces Grants Review Working Party; Open Spaces and City Gardens – Finsbury Circus Garden Reinstatement Working Party. This shows just how considerably involved he was at every possible stage.

As Chairman, Alderman Luder was, in many ways, ahead of his time. For example, he was fundamental to developing a partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association. The embers of which have fed into a fully-fledged sports strategy which the City recognises will be fundamental to re-invigorating the Square Mile, and beyond, post-Covid. Furthermore, he championed our volunteer scheme, which is thriving today, as well as ensuring continued improvements accessibility across our open spaces.

Under his leadership, the City received Green Flag and Green Heritage standards, and Gold Awards in both London- and Britain in Bloom. Both exceptional achievements.

This of course is in no way intended to overlook the Ian's contributions as Alderman, and indeed Lord Mayor, but hope it goes some way of capturing Members' sentiments in celebrating his contributions to this particular Committee. These will be made in the usual way at the Court of Alderman and indeed the Court of Common Council in due course and I add my considerable thanks for his immense wisdom in advising me since I became Chair.

We wish you, Lin and the family all the best for the future.

RESOLVED – That, the formal thanks for Alderman Ian Luder be noted by the board.

9. **FORMAL THANKS TO STEFANIA HORNE**

The Chairman asked the Natural Environment Director to provide a formal thanks to Stefania Horne for her service and contribution to the board.

The Natural Environment Director noted that Stefania had made an enormous impression adding that her energy, leadership skills and can-do attitude would be greatly missed. The Director added that Stefania had worked through a difficult period during the Target Operating Model, assisting greatly with the new structure of the North London Open Spaces and with the sad passing of Declan Gallagher. The board thanked Stefania and wished her well in her exciting new role.

RESOVLED – That, the formal thanks to Stefania Horne be noted by the board.

MATTERS ARISING

The board observed a moment of reflection as requested by the Chairman for the passing of Declan Gallagher. The Assistant Director provided an Obituary.

In his 17 years of service with the City of London Corporation, Declan was a dedicated and professional manager who put his heart and soul into looking after Hampstead Heath and other open spaces in North London.

Thanks to his very positive attitude and extensive experience, he was instrumental in maintaining the highest of standards.

Declan was very passionate about his work and very proud of Hampstead Heath and all the other open spaces he managed, including Queen's Park, Golders Hill Park and West Ham Park.

A lot of the improvements over the years were delivered because of Declan's hard work and determination, starting from the stumpery in Golders Hill Park at the beginning of his career, to the more recent projects such as the renovations of the playgrounds at the Heath Extension and in Queen's Park. He was also involved in the recent transformation of the sport facilities, including the cricket pitches at Parliament Hill and West Ham Park and the Athletics track at Parliament Hill.

Declan was highly respected in the green spaces sector, becoming a judge in the national Green Flag Award scheme. He was very experienced in horticulture and grounds maintenance, and extremely knowledgeable in all the operations needed to maintain our own green spaces to the highest standards. Declan managed a wider team of dedicated staff and under his leadership, the Heath, Queen's Park and – recently - West Ham Park were able to receive awards such as the Green Flag and London in Bloom every year. He was an exemplary manager and leader.

Declan was a lovely man and touched the heart of so many during the years he worked at the City of London Corporation. His funeral, attended by many of his colleagues and friends, was testament to the number of people who loved and respected him. He was respected by staff and stakeholders including the Heath and Hampstead Society, local Friends groups such as QPARA and Friends of West Ham Park, Friends of Kenwood, the Hampstead Gardens Suburb Trust, Heath Hands and many other local groups. He was also

respected by the Members of both the Consultative and Management committees and local councillors from Camden, Haringey, Barnet, Brent and Newham, alongside many other local sport clubs and organisations.

His passing was a shock for all. His staff, friends and colleagues have many fond memories of Declan. He was kind, generous and had a great sense of humour. He will be greatly missed but we will cherish his memory.

RESOLVED – That the moment of reflection and obituary be noted by the board.

10. INTRODUCTION OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DIRECTOR

The board received the verbal update from the Natural Environment Director.

The Natural Environment Director informed the board that she had been in post just over a month and had seen firsthand the fantastic variety of work that was being undertaken by colleagues in the Natural Environment Department. The Director explained that she had already visited several sites and looked forward to visiting and meeting colleagues from other areas.

The Director informed the board of her previous work, noting how she had trained previously as an ecologist and had worked for a range of nature conservation organisations such as the London Wildlife Trust, the Butterfly Conservation, and the Zoological Society in London.

The Director noted that her top priority in the first month was to familiarise herself with the Target Operating Model which was taking place and reach out to all those staff affected to ensure consistency across the Corporation.

RESOLVED – That, the verbal update from the Natural Environment Director be noted by the board.

11. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD DINNER

The board were informed the item would be taken in the non-public session of the meeting.

12. ENVIRONMENT ACT 2021 REGULATIONS ON BIODIVERSITY

The Board received the report of the Remembrancer providing a synopsis of the implementation Regulations that came into force to implement the Environment Act 2021.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding responsibility for producing biodiversity reports and development in the City to seek biodiversity credits outside the square mile, Officers noted that responsibility for producing reports sits with planning with the Natural Environment Department providing support in terms of advice. In terms of biodiversity credits outside the square mile, the board were informed that the preferred option was always for the developer to enhance their biodiversity protection, however if this was not feasible, then the next option would be to enhance the development locally.

RESOLVED – That, the report be noted.

13. OPEN SPACES BUSINESS PLAN 2022/23 - YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Board received a report from the Environment Director Environment providing Members with a review of the delivery of the 2022/23 high-level Open Spaces Business Plan which was approved by the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee in December 2021.

The board was informed by the Natural Environment Director that the department had been reviewing strategic work that has been done so far with several draught strategies produced for the Natural Environment Division. It was noted that there was a plan in place to consolidate and finalise these strategies with an away date to be arrange for 21 September 2023 which would focus on finalising the vision, strategic direction, and key objectives for the division and help to enable Members to provide feedback in an appropriate time.

In response to a point raised by a Member, the Director agreed that it would be appropriate to consult with various stakeholder and consultative groups prior to any away day to assist with feeding into strategies moving forward.

RESOLVED – That, the report be noted.

14. REVENUE OUTTURN 2022/23 - NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD

The Board received a joint report of Chamberlain and Interim Executive Director, Environment comparing compares the revenue outturn for the services overseen by your Board in 2022/23 with the final agreed budget for the year.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the cyclical works programme, Officers noted that these budgets were managed by the City Surveyors and set at the start of the year. The board was informed that the technical works programme was a rolling three-year programme and as such any variances and delays in the programme were adjusted accordingly.

In response to a question raised by a Members regarding central risk net expenditure increase from 2023/24, Officers informed the board that there were costs incurred relating to redundancy as well as pension strain costs associated with retirement as such, they were incurred on central risk which did not affect the directorate local risk budget.

RESOLVED – That, the report be noted.

15. COMMEMORATIVE BENCHES AND TREES POLICY

The Board considered a report of the Environment Director Environment concerning the Commemorative Benches and Trees Policy aims to formalize the existing offer for benches and trees in City Gardens and Public Realm.

Officers noted that Commemorative trees would no longer be regularly offered, except for exceptional cases reviewed by a committee. Members were informed that there would be a separate report later in the year to discuss how individuals and organisations can contribute to tree planting in general.

In response to a question raised by a Member, Officers informed the board the responsibility for sponsoring a bench lies with City Gardens and any concerns about the wording on plaques for commemorative benches would be brought to their attention for a final decision. The board noted that Sponsorship of benches was currently prohibited within the Square Mile, preventing organisations from using benches for self-promotion. Officers recommended returning to the board with a proposal for allowing tree sponsorship in the form of commemorative trees.

RESOLVED – That Members,

- a) Approve the adoption of the draft Commemorative Benches and Trees Policy included in Appendix 1 of the report.

16. KING GEORGE'S FIELD-CITY OF LONDON TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

The Board received a joint report of Chamberlain and Interim Executive Director, Environment concerning the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year ended 31 March 2022.

RESOLVED – That, the report be noted.

17. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT

The Board considered a report from the Interim Executive Director Environment concerning Risk Management Update.

Officers informed the board, since the last report, one risk related to finance and budgets had been eliminated from the register. This risk was specific to the 2022/23 financial year and has been successfully resolved. It was noted that the current Cross Divisional Risk Register primarily comprises risks that are common to all the charities and each charity maintains a specific risk register for their individual site, which may include site-specific risks.

Following a discussion by Members on mitigation of risks, Officers agreed to present detailed risk registers that include specific mitigating actions to the next meeting. Officers agreed to include actions taken to address these risks and Members of the board agreed to remove the word 'mitigate' from the recommendation as outlined in the report.

RESOLVED – That Members,

- a) Confirmed, on behalf of the City Corporation as Trustee, that the Natural Environment Cross-Divisional Summary Risk Register satisfactorily identified the key top-level risks to the charities and that appropriate systems are in place to identify risks across the charities.

- b) Note the report, the City Gardens Summary Risk Register (Appendix 2), and the action being taken to effectively manage these risks.

18. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no questions in the public session.

19. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED**

There were several items of other business.

The Board were provided with an update on St Dunstan's Park.

- **Challenges due to Popularity:** St Dunstan's in the East is experiencing issues related to its increasing popularity.
- **Diverse Uses:** The garden is being utilised for various activities, including photography, filming, weddings, and social media content.
- **Detriment to Garden and Visitor Experience:** The extensive use of the garden for these purposes is negatively impacting the garden's condition and the enjoyment of other visitors.
- **Simultaneous Photo Shoots:** Multiple professional photo shoots are occurring simultaneously, occupying large portions of the garden.
- **Events Policy:** In response to this situation, the city implemented an events policy in 2018. This policy regulates professional photography activities and mandates obtaining a license for such events

The board were provided with an update on Bunhill Fields.

- **Bunhill Fields:** Essential part of city gardens, situated just over the Islington border.
- **Joint Management:** Managed collaboratively by our team, the Environment team, and City Surveyors.
- **Heritage Focus:** Focus on heritage preservation and historical structures.
- **Chair's Visit:** Chair visited the site with the Friends of City Gardens.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite historical importance, Bunhill Fields faces common challenges.
- **Conservation Management Plan:** City Services is spearheading a comprehensive plan, covering all aspects, including graves and structures.
- **Progressive Approach:** Plan to present it as a dynamic management plan, not a static document to the committee.

The board were provided with a presentation by the Assistant Director/Superintendent, North London Open Spaces on the sports strategy which highlighted the designed which would align with the corporate sports strategy of the Square Mile. Members were informed that the goal was to ensure a cohesive approach, understand user needs, and optimise our facilities within the natural environment.

20. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**
RESOLVED – That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.
21. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**
RESOLVED – That the non-public minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 February 2023, be approved as an accurate record.
22. **CORPORATE CHARITIES REVIEW SCOPING EXERCISE TO SUPPORT THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITIES REVIEW**
The Board considered a joint report of the Managing Director of Bridge House Estates and the Natural Environment Director.
23. **DEBT ARREARS - NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DIVISION PERIOD ENDING: 31 MAY 2023**
The Board received a joint report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment.
24. **HISTORICAL INCOME REPORT (2017/18-2024) FOR ASHTEAD COMMON**
The Board noted the item had been withdrawn.
25. **HISTORICAL INCOME REPORT (2017/18-2024) FOR BURNHAM BEECHES**
The Board noted the item had been withdrawn.
26. **HISTORICAL INCOME REPORT (2017/18-2024) FOR EPPING FOREST**
The Board noted the item had been withdrawn.
27. **HISTORICAL INCOME REPORT (2017/18-2024) FOR WEST WICKHAM AND COULSDON COMMONS**
The Board noted the item had been withdrawn.
28. **UPDATE ON MONUMENT**
The Board noted that a verbal update would be provided at the next meeting.
29. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**
There were no non-public questions.
30. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**
The Board received one item of other business.
31. **TOM PHASE II UPDATE**
The Board received a verbal update of the Interim Executive Director, Environment.

The meeting ended at 12.00pm

Chairman

Contact Officer: Blair Stringman
Blair.Stringman@cityoflondon.gov.uk