

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD
Tuesday, 10 December 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Natural Environment Board held at Committee Room -
2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Tuesday, 10 December 2024 at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Caroline Haines (Chair)
Eamonn Mullally (Deputy Chairman)
Anne Corbett
Wendy Mead OBE
Benjamin Murphy
Deputy Alpa Raja
James St John Davis
Heather Barrett-Mold
Tony Leach
Catherine Bickmore (Observer)

In Attendance:

William Upton KC

Externals:

Niall McEvoy (Viritoria)

Officers:

Anna Cowperthwaite	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's
Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Melanie Charalambous	- Environment Department
Simon Glynn	- Environment Department
Ian Hughes	- Environment Department
Joe Kingston	- Environment Department
Jake Tibbetts	- Environment Department
Joseph Smith	- Town Clerk's Department
Callum Southern	- Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Andrew McMurtrie JP and Verderer Paul Morris.

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

No declarations were received under the Code of Conduct in respect of items on the agenda.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That, the public minutes and non-public summary of the last meeting held on 17 October 2024 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

4. **ANNUAL REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee received a report which included the Terms of Reference for the Committee's consideration before submission to the Policy and Resources Committee.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Approved the terms of reference of the Natural Environment Board, subject to any comments, for submission to the Court of Common Council in April, and that any further changes required in the lead up to the Court's appointment of Committees be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman.

5. **BIOPHILIC EVIDENCE BASED DESIGN AND INTEGRATING NATURE FOR LONGEVITY - PRESENTATION**

The Committee received a presentation from Niall McEvoy of Viritopia.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) A Member queried what the downsides of applying moss to the side of buildings was. Mr. McEvoy indicated moss found inside was preserved moss and would be good for the acoustics of a room and provide a biophilic effect. However, it did not provide an effect and was not urban greening.
- b) The Chair raised the issue of living walls and solutions to ensure they could be successful in urban environments. Mr. McEvoy indicated there needed to be an introduction of more Mediterranean species of plant to ensure resilience and noted that there was a significant variance between the temperature on the façade of a building and that behind a living wall.
- c) Another Member raised the issue of maintenance and cost and indicated there was value for the Board in coordinating a City-wide response. The Member also enquired how life could be sustained in the City if there was a shortage of water. Mr. McEvoy told the Committee maintenance could not be avoided.

6. **YOUTH NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair on the Natural Environment Board.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) The Chair noted that the Lord Mayor's speech, at the High Commissioner's Banquet at Mansion House, was focus on the role of the Youth Natural Environment Board and the work being done with the Royal Commonwealth Society.
- b) The Chair stated that the Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Surrey was in progress and hoped it would be signed by February 2025.
- c) The Chair also told the Committee that the Youth Natural Environment Board would take a national lead in the global relay to clean up rivers.
- d) The Chair added that YNEB was preparing a sustainability survey to be taken to the City of London family of schools.

7. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CHARITY DEVELOPMENT - VERBAL UPDATE

The Committee received a verbal update from the Assistant Director of Charity Development.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) A Member queried that there was a hope a handbook would be produced from the Natural Environment Charities Review which would assist with the business and management plans of the charities.
- b) The Member also asked whether the Field Studies Council could be considered. Officers explained that the work they had outlined already was for lodges and domestic properties only as they came under the charity's EPC requirements and the Field Studies Council centre had more to do with the lease involved and the division of responsibilities.

8. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR CULTURE AND PROJECT'S UPDATE REPORT Q2: JULY-SEPTEMBER 2024

The Committee received a report which provided an update against workstreams, outcomes and key performance indicators from the Natural Environment Division Business Plan and objectives from the Natural Environment Strategies that were applicable to staff in the Culture and Projects Section covering July-September 2025 (Q2).

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) A Member considered why income had fallen at Monument. Officers explained they had been discussing how to transfer services into a new culture service area and had been developing a transition plan. Officers added they were working closely with City Bridge Foundation to transition Monument into a permanent place in the cultural service area.

- b) The Member asked whether there was a plan to reduce losses should the transition not occur. Officers told the Committee they were reviewing opportunities to decrease the overspend, particularly looking at whether it was open on the days it should be, as well as a local business partnership to seek income generation opportunities.
- c) Officers added they had discussions with the Chamberlains to consider moving the Monument out of the Environment Department's local risk into central risk.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the report.

9. ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT HIGH-LEVEL BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25 – PROGRESS REPORT (MID- YEAR)

The Committee provided an update on progress made by the Natural Environment Division and City Gardens Team towards delivery of the Environment Department's high-level Business Plan 2024/25 and summarised the progress that had been made against major workstreams and performance measures during the first two quarters of 2024/25.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the content of the report and its appendices.

10. CITY GARDENS UPDATE

The Committee provided an update to Members of the Natural Environment Board on current management and operational activities across the City Gardens section.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) A Member suggested making nearby pubs and cafes aware of the London Gardens Weekend as a lot of people would flow through Finsbury Circus. Another Member stated it needed to be done throughout the City as there was a significant programme that weekend.
- b) Another Member advised Officers reaching out to colleagues at The Commons who had spent a lot of time working on policy around dogs in open spaces and suggested keeping the branding from The Commons.
- c) The Member raised the issue of blue barriers around the City as it had become more of an issue. Officers indicated they were aware and there was intermittent blitzes on collecting abandoned street furniture and the respective utilities or contractors could be dealt with if they were not maintaining them. Officers added that Members should document where they could be found.

- d) Caution was advised by a Member on creating a division between dog owners and non-dog owners and queried whether there was any data relating to incidents involving dogs. Officers indicated they did record data on incidents involving dogs being off leads, dog fouling, and noted that the gardeners had access to a mobile reporting application to report incidents. Officers added that the funding for the keeper post had been achieved by demonstrating the issues through data collected.
- e) A Member indicated there was an increase in the number of dog friendly hotels in the City and raised the issue of creating infrastructure to accommodate that trend.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the report.

11. **CITY GARDENS EVENT POLICY AND FEES AND CHARGES FOR 25/26**

The Committee received a report which outlined updates to the City Gardens Events Policy and related fees and charges in preparation for the reopening of Finsbury Circus Gardens in 2025.

Officers informed the Committee they suggested a late change to the recommendations to read:

- To agree in principle and authorise the Assistant Director Gardens and Cleaning, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair, to finalise the text of the City Gardens Events Policy.
- Approve the new Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 2 in this report.

Officers informed the Committee the suggested change was due to late comments which had been received following the deadline which did not impact substantively on the policy, but did make sense to include. Officers added that legal had added for language to be tightened up with regard to closing times and that the main changes to the policy related to Finsbury Circus which was a much larger site and facilitated the need for a policy change.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) A Member sought clarification that Finsbury Circus was funded by the City Fund. Officers confirmed that was correct.
- b) A Member suggested a level of delegated authority would be needed to flex rates, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair. The Chair suggested that could be taken forward to the February meeting as it would provide an added flexibility. Officers indicated they would also bring a Fees and Charges report back that would highlight any events that had a discount applied to them.

- c) Officers added they would need the added flexibility as there was uncertainty about what events would be presented and needed to gauge the events offer.
- d) Another Member raised the issue of the cost on wear and tear of the Open Spaces and drew attention to Martin's Law which was likely to present an added cost. Officers explained that £750 for wear-and-tear was taken aside and returned to the contractor of the event if there was none.
- e) A Member queried whether filming events were included in the fees and charges. Officers confirmed it was not, but would revert filming queries to the filming team should they be made.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Agreed in principle and authorised the Assistant Director Gardens and Cleaning, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair, to finalise the text of the City Gardens Events Policy.
- Approved the new Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 2 in this report.

12. KING GEORGE'S FIELD - CITY OF LONDON TRUSTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

The Committee received the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024 for King George's Field – City of London (charity registration number 1085967) which were presented for information in the format required by the Charity Commission.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the 2023/24 Financial Year for King George's Field – City of London.

13. CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY, COOL STREETS AND GREENING PROGRAMME – PHASE 3 CITY GREENING AND BIODIVERSITY (FANN STREET AND ST PETER WESTCHEAP)

The Committee received a Gateway 4: Detailed Sign report which sought approval of the detailed designs for the relandscaping of Fann Street (west) and St Peter Westcheap churchyard to be progressed to Gateway 5.

RESOLVED – That, Members noted the report.

14. UPCOMING DATES OF INTEREST TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD

The Committee noted dates of interest to the Natural Environment Board.

The Chair informed the Committee that Tuesday 7 April was the opening of the Big Curry Lunch Garden and a joint reception with the Worshipful Company of Gardeners.

15. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

There were no questions on matters relating to the work of the Committee.

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

The Deputy Chairman informed the Committee that Friday 6 December 2024 would be the date of the inaugural meeting of the Income Generation Working Group whose tasks was to examine opportunities for income generation and ensure charities were compliant with regulations in regard to income generation. He also added that the City was recruiting a specialist who would act as an advisor of the Working Group. Officers added that representatives from the Chamberlain's transformation team had been invited to the Working Group meetings.

17. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

18. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES

18.1 Non-Public Minutes of the 17 October Meeting of Natural Environment Board

RESOLVED – That, the non-public minutes of the last meeting held on 17 October 2024 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

18.2 Informal Non-Public Notes of the 17 October 2024 Meeting of Natural Environment Board

RESOLVED – That, Members noted the informal non-public notes.

19. DEBT ARREARS - NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DIVISION - 30/09/2024

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment.

20. REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk.

21. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

There were no questions on matters relating to the work of the Committee raised in non-public session.

22. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED

The Chair raised two items of any other business that she considered urgent and which the Committee agreed should be considered whilst the public were excluded.

The meeting ended at 12.27 pm

Chairman

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