

Committees :	Dates :
Open Spaces, City Gardens and West Ham Park Committee	8 October 2012
Epping Forest and Commons Committee	5 November 2012
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	26 November 2012
Subject:	Public
Green Flag and London in Bloom Awards	
Report of:	For Decision
Director of Open Spaces	

Summary

This report informs the Committee of the City Corporation's overall success in the Green Flag Awards this year, provides feedback on the judging process and compares performance with the national results. The report also describes the success achieved by the City Gardens and West Ham Park in the annual London in Bloom Awards.

This year the City's Open Spaces, including the City of London Cemetery and Crematorium, retained 15 Green Flag Awards and nine of the sites were also judged to be of a high enough standard to be awarded Green Heritage Site accreditation, including Kenley Common for the first time.

The City Gardens and West Ham Park were also very successful in winning four London in Bloom categories, including four Gold Awards.

Recommendations

I recommend that

- (i) the great success achieved by the City Corporation's Open Spaces in the Green Flag and London in Bloom Awards is noted and is reported to the Court of Common Council meeting on 25 October 2012.
- (ii) the staff and volunteers at all the Open Spaces are congratulated on their hard work throughout the year to ensure their sites won these prestigious Awards.

Main Report

Background

1. The Green Flag Award is the national standard for parks and green spaces in England and Wales and is designed to recognise and reward the best green spaces in the country. It is also seen as a way of encouraging others to achieve the same high environmental standards, creating a benchmark of excellence in recreational green areas. The scheme was launched in England and Wales in 1996, as a means of recognising and rewarding the best green spaces in the country and the first Awards were presented in 1997.
2. This independent Award aims to set standards for management and to promote the value of parks and green spaces as social places as well as places for walking, play, informal sports and for contact with the natural world. Although the Award was originally set up for public parks, it was recognised that a wider range of green spaces needed to be included if the quality of public green spaces across the United Kingdom was to be improved.
3. Since 2009 the Green Flag Award scheme has been managed by a consortium comprising Keep Britain Tidy, The Conservation Volunteers and GreenSpace which is known collectively as the Green Flag Plus Partnership and manages the scheme on behalf of the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). A Green Flag Advisory Board advises the DCLG on the development of the scheme and brings together the principal stakeholders to discuss its future direction and monitor performance.
4. In the current economic climate with many people looking to enjoy the outdoors, the provision of high quality, free open spaces is of particular importance. The Green Flag scheme is committed to create cleaner, safer and greener communities for all and is one of the key mechanisms for measuring high standards. One of the most significant aspects of the Award is that only green spaces that are free to enter and open to the public are eligible to win. Each park or green space is judged against eight key criteria:
 - A Welcoming Place
 - Healthy, Safe and Secure
 - Clean and Well Maintained
 - Sustainability

- Conservation and Heritage
 - Community Involvement
 - Marketing
 - Management
5. Green Heritage Site accreditation, which is sponsored by English Heritage, is awarded in recognition of achieving the required standard in the management and interpretation of a site with local or national historic importance. The sites are judged on the treatment of their historic features and the standard of conservation.
 6. Parks and green spaces inevitably offer a variety of facilities and are managed and developed in response to a wide range of opportunities and constraints. Judging criteria is therefore sufficiently flexible to allow for these, as well as recognising and encouraging innovation.
 7. While the standards for the Green Flag Award are high, each application is considered on its own merits. It is recognised that every green space has its own unique character and this is reflected in the assessment process. Judging is conducted on a points system based on a desk assessment and an on site evaluation, when required.

2012/13 Green Flag Awards

8. The consortium judged the scheme this year based on a number of factors, taking into account that the scheme's growth is outstripping judging capacity, and reflecting the intelligence being picked up from the industry and discussions at the Green Flag Advisory Board. As a result this year judges only visited all new entries, those with lower scores last year and sites where anomalies had been identified previously. This meant that the City's sites were generally not visited this year because of the high standards previously recorded. However mystery shopping takes place during the year to ensure performance standards are maintained.
9. As part of the further development of the scheme in the last year, the Open Spaces Department has also participated in a Green Flag pilot that seeks to award, through self assessment, a Group Award for organisations that have a high number of Green Flag sites. As part of this pilot, a peer review assessment of the City's Open Spaces was carried out in December 2011 when officers from other authorities met the management team and visited two sites (City Commons and Bunhill Fields). Their overall impression from the assessment was that 'the City's Open Spaces are

extremely well managed by a very strong and capable staff team, working alongside enthusiastic and committed volunteers’.

10. The Green Flag Award scheme has now been in operation for sixteen years and has attracted more entries each year. This year 1,424 green spaces received a Green Flag Award across the country, compared to 1,290 site winners the previous year. The City can be proud that this included all 14 of its Open Spaces that entered plus the City of London Cemetery and Crematorium. In the sixteen years since the Green Flag Award was first presented, Highgate Wood and Queen’s Park remain two of only a few sites in the country that have received the Award every year.
11. Epping Forest, Ashted Common, Burnham Beeches, Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, West Ham Park , Bunhill Fields and the Cemetery and Crematorium also maintained their Green Heritage Site status and Kenley Common received this recognition for the first time. This year 51 sites were judged nationally to be of a high enough standard to distinguish them as sites of historical significance and the City again had more Green Heritage Sites than any other authority in this category.
12. As has been the case in recent years, no formal Awards ceremony was held this year although all Award winners were encouraged to publicise their achievements and each site organised its own local celebration to thank their volunteers and acknowledge their commitment and the pride they took in their sites.
13. The growing importance of the Green Flag Award for local authorities across the country, in terms of seeking to gain additional resources for their sites, has resulted in many Metropolitan Councils submitting more of their sites for the Award, particularly in North West England. However the City Corporation still remains one of the authorities across the country with the highest number of Green Flags, in recognition of the high standards of our Open Spaces.

London in Bloom Awards

14. City Gardens and West Ham Park achieved further success when the annual London in Bloom Awards were presented at Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park on 18 September 2012, when parks and open spaces across London were recognised for their contribution to local and regional recreation and horticulture. The City Corporation’s Open Spaces had a very successful day and won the following Awards :

Borough - Town Category : (based on overall performance for horticulture and maintenance, cleansing and sustainability and community engagement) : Gold Award for the City of London

Park of the Year: Gold and Category Winner for West Ham Park

Small Park of the Year: Gold and Category Winner for Christchurch Greyfriars plus a Gold Award for Cleary Garden and two Silver Gilt Awards (for Portsoken Street Garden and St. Pancras Garden).

Small Cemetery Award (up to five acres): Silver Gilt and Category Winner for Bunhill Fields

15. In their overall report, the judges commented that ‘one thing that stands out apart from the excellent displays in the City is that the whole of the Gardens team from the top to the bottom is dedicated and show a real enthusiasm for their work and a pride and understanding for the job, it was a pleasure to see.’

Other Awards

16. The City Gardens have also participated in the London Garden Squares Awards and the results will be announced on 10 October.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

17. The achievement of winning these Awards supports most of the themes in the City Together Strategy, including ‘supporting our communities’, ‘protecting, promoting and enhancing our environment’, and a City which is ‘vibrant and culturally rich’ and ‘is safer and stronger’. Maintaining a Green Flag Award for each Open Space supports the strategic aim in the departmental Business Plan ‘to provide safe, secure and accessible Open Spaces and services for the benefit of London and the nation’.

Conclusion

18. This has been another highly successful year for the City Corporation in the Green Flag and London in Bloom Awards and the high standards set within its Open Spaces have again been acknowledged nationally. The City also has the highest number of Green Heritage Sites in the country. The achievement of these Awards is a great tribute to the dedication and the hard work of all the staff in the Open Spaces Department, including the City of London Cemetery and Crematorium, and the large teams of local volunteers who help to maintain the high quality of our Open Spaces

throughout the year. Future management plans across the Open Spaces will continue to be influenced by the criteria used in the Green Flag Awards scheme.

19. The Green Flag Award Scheme is the impetus for an ever-increasing improvement in the quality of our parks and green spaces. It continues to provide an independent assessment of each site against prescribed criteria, although the future management arrangements for the Scheme need to be confirmed in the coming year. As the benchmark against which the quality of public parks and green spaces is measured, it is important that the standards are maintained and that recommendations to improve service delivery are carefully considered and where possible implemented.
20. The Open Spaces Department's success in winning a number of national and London Awards is being reported to the Court of Common Council meeting on 25 October 2012.

Contact:

Denis Whelton

020 7332 3517

denis.whelton@cityoflondon.gov.uk