

Committee(s): Epping Forest & Commons Open Spaces & City Gardens West Ham Park Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood & Queens Park	Dated: 12 July 2021 13 July 2021 13 July 2021 29 September 2021
Subject: Open Spaces Departmental Business Plan 2020/21 – Year End performance report	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Colin Buttery – Director, Open Spaces	For Information
Report author: Gerry Kiefer, Open Spaces	

Summary

This report provides Members with a review of the Open Spaces Department’s delivery of its 2020/21 Business Plan. This Plan was agreed in February 2021 before the Coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, not all the actions and priorities have been completed. The report highlights the main achievements and progress that has been made against the Business Plan’s four priority outcomes. It also identifies other areas of progress listed under the three overarching objectives of the Department.

The report identifies the level of achievement against performance measures, recognising that in some instances it was impossible to set targets. Several performance measures were not achieved as some facilities and venues were closed during periods of 2020/21.

Financially, the services that report through the Open Spaces Committees closely managed their budgets, such that at year end there was only a small net overspend of £64k in City Fund and a City’s Cash underspend of £5k against the net budgets that were reset in November.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Open Spaces & City Gardens Committee approved the [Departmental Business Plan 2020/21](#) (Appendix 1) on 3 February 2020.
2. The Department's Vision is: *to enrich people's lives by enhancing and providing access to ecologically diverse open spaces and outstanding heritage assets across London and beyond.*
3. The Department's three overarching objectives are:
 - A. Open spaces and historic sites are thriving and accessible.
 - B. Spaces enrich people's lives.
 - C. Business practices are responsible and sustainable.Under each of these three objectives sit a total of twelve outcomes (See page 4 in Appendix 1).
4. The Department's Business Plan identified four outcomes that would be the priority for 2020-21:
 - I. Maximise the value and opportunities of our built and natural assets
 - II. Protect and enhance our sites biodiversity and determine the value of our green infrastructure
 - III. Engage with the local planning processes to mitigate and protect against the negative impact of development on our open spaces
 - IV. Develop innovative approaches to income diversification

Current Position

4. The Business Plan was agreed prior to Covid-19 and therefore did not take account of the impact the pandemic would have on the services and resources available to the Department.
5. Throughout 2020, Covid restrictions on travel resulted in all the open spaces having significantly greater visitor numbers than usual, which has had a negative impact on many sites. The greater number of visitors also meant that staff resources, which were reduced due to shielding, self-isolation and illness, had to be refocussed to ensure provision of essential services. Meanwhile our heritage visitor attractions and sports facilities were required to close, re-open with Covid safe operating procedures, close again and re-open, due to the various periods of lockdown restrictions.
6. Reports on the Business Plan performance in relation to services which sit outside the responsibility of Open Spaces Committees are reported separately.

Delivering our priority outcomes

7. Below are listed key areas of progress that were achieved in 2020/21 listed under the four priority outcomes.
 - I. **Maximise the value and opportunities of our built and natural assets**
 - Progressed Finsbury Circus reinstatement

- Progressed the masterplan for the future of West Ham Park Nursery site
- COL's Climate Action Strategy was agreed which includes Carbon Removal projects to be delivered by Open Spaces, initially focussed in and around Epping Forest, primarily on buffer land.

II. Protect and enhance our sites' biodiversity and determine the value of our green infrastructure

- City of London Biodiversity Action Plan drafted for consultation
- Desk based tree canopy survey undertaken and shows 5% canopy cover in the City
- Discussions held with South London Downs National Nature Reserve partners regarding sharing resources to improve the landscape's biodiversity
- Grazing expanded at The Commons and onto Wanstead Park, Epping Forest

III. Engage with the local planning processes to mitigate and protect against the negative impact of development on our open spaces

- Mitigation strategies developed / approved with host Authorities: Epping Forest District Council and Buckinghamshire Council
- Feedback given on planning applications, to the planning authorities across the properties.
- Introduction of 'red line' parking restrictions to reduce encroachment on land by cars implemented at Epping Forest
- Introduced Permanent Clear Way along Ditches Lane on Farthing Downs and various parking restrictions around BB under formal consultation.

IV. Develop innovative approaches to income diversification

- Committee approval to let a lodge on the edge of Kenley Common and an office at Farthing Downs
- Holiday lodge refurbishment completed, and bookings taken at Epping Forest.
- Campaign donations pages on website went live in December 2020 and March 2021
- Regular benchmarking of fees and charges, as reported to Committees.

8. The Business plan also identified a number of other areas of work that would help achieve the departments overarching objectives. Despite the impact of Covid 19, the following activity was progressed:

Open Spaces and Historic Sites Are Thriving and Accessible

- ✦ Committee agreed the 2021-2031: Ashted Management Plan and West Wickham & Spring Park Management Plans
- ✦ Capital funding approved for Carbon Removals project as part of Climate Action Strategy
- ✦ Completed the refurbishment of the Highgate Wood Pavilion Café toilets in December 2020
- ✦ Undertook partnership working with Plantlife HLF Back from the Brink project, including survey of lichens and the rare moss *Zygodon forsteri* at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.

- ✦ Completed the engineering assessment for the large Raised Reservoirs in the Wanstead Park lake cascade
- ✦ Working in partnership with Parochial Church Councils and the Diocese of London to access funding to enhance City churchyards

Spaces Enrich People's Lives

- ✦ Completed the review of Hampstead Heath Bathing Ponds and a range of outcomes identified which were implemented during 2020/21 together with additional Covid-19 related operational changes including: contactless payment systems, contactless season ticket wristbands and on-line booking for swimming sessions.
- ✦ Installed new signage at Kenley Revival Project, marking the projects final phase.
- ✦ Committee approved use of COL capital funding to refurbish the playground at West Ham Park.
- ✦ Online nature-focused learning tools developed for schools and families which they could do themselves as well as printed activity sheets which were shared via food banks, community centres and hostels, reaching families who may not have access to a computer.

Business practices are responsible and sustainable

- ✦ Successfully introduced remote working across the workforce
- ✦ Committee approved the Epping Forest Deer Management Strategy
- ✦ Completed the introduction of cashless car park charging at Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown Common and moved to 7 days a week charging at Burnham Beeches
- ✦ Geotechnical engineers designed and installed safety system comprising bolting, wiring and netting the quarry face at Riddlesdown to prevent rockfall.
- ✦ Successful introduction of on-line booking and payment for many activities due to Covid-19 regulations

Key Data - Performance Measures

9. The Department identified seventeen performance measures to cover its range of services. At the start of 2020/21 several facilities were closed due to Lockdown 1 and as the duration of the Lockdown and its implications were unclear, targets were not set. This was the case for:

- Visitor numbers to our various heritage attractions
- Customer satisfaction scores at our various heritage visitor attractions
- Tennis court usage
- Learning programme engagement
- Volunteer hours
- Apprentice performance

10. For those performance measures where we did set targets, we:

- retained all our Green Flag and Green Heritage Awards
- reduced short-term sickness levels
- reduced our use of electricity, gas and water.

- put on hold our ancient tree management works at Epping Forest due to lack of clarity of the value of the Countryside Stewardship Grant (The Stewardship agreement was eventually confirmed in March 2021 with a £1.3million grant over the ten year period 2020 to 2029)
- received fewer visits to our webpages compared to 2019/20 which may be due to the introduction of the new corporate website in July 2020, which means that the Open Spaces information is more streamlined and there are fewer pages for people to visit
- missed the 85% Corporate target, by 1% (achieved 84%) for investigating health and safety accidents, due to staff capacity and availability.
- continued to comment on local authority planning applications as reported regularly to Committees

11. The table of performance against performance measures is attached as Appendix 2

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

12. **The Corporate Plan** - The Open Spaces Department actively contributes to all three Corporate Plan 2018-23 aims:

- Contribute to a flourishing society
- Support a thriving economy
- Shape outstanding environments

and ten of its twelve outcomes.

13. **Corporate Strategies** - The activity undertaken to deliver the Business Plan also helps achieve the outcomes of a range of Corporate strategies including:

- Responsible Business strategy
- Climate Action strategy
- Sport and Physical Activity strategy
- Transport strategy
- Education, Cultural and Creative Learning and Skills Strategy

Financial implications

14. Closure of facilities and cancellation of events due to Government lockdown restrictions impacted on expenditure and income. Across the Corporation, budgets were reviewed and reset in November which was prior to, and without predicting further lockdowns during early 2021.

15. The services that report to this Committee were not able to achieve their income targets, however by regular in depth forecasting and closely managing expenditure the services that report to this Committee were able to almost achieve the overall net expenditure budget.

- The **net expenditure outturn position** for the Open Spaces City Fund and City Cash budgets reporting to the various Open Spaces Committees, was a £59k (0.5%) overspend from a total net local risk budget of £13million.

- The **total income outturn position** was £4,748,000 which was £808k (15%) below target.
- The **total expenditure outturn position** was £17,986,000 which was £749k (4%) below target.

16. The information below details the outturn position against budget, by Fund.

- **City Fund** – spent 103% of its local risk expenditure budget and achieved 99% of its local risk income target. City Fund was only £64k (6%) overspent on its overall net budget position. This was largely due to additional transport related spend, higher than anticipated irrigation costs and overspend on equipment and materials.
- **City's Cash** – spent 95% of its local risk expenditure budget and achieved 84% of its local risk income target. City's Cash total overall net position was only £5,000 underspent against its revised budget position set in November 2020

17. More detailed information regarding the year end outturn financial position for each Service Committee is provided in the Revenue Outturn reports from the Chamberlains Department.

18. The Department successfully applied for internal funding from the Covid 19 Fund, awarded £65k for additional costs associated with health and safety changes for staff and customers. Funding applications for additional support for costs associated with waste collection and removal, plus security costs, were also considered later in the year, but as these costs had already been forecast and factored into the resetting of budgets, funding was not awarded.

19. Resource implications – None

20. Legal implications – None

21. Risk implications – none

Equalities implications

22. The Business Plan identified five equalities and inclusion priorities for which additional activity has been undertaken. Some examples are shown below:

- i. **Improve accessibility within our sites, subject to funding.**
 - Awarded capital funding of £755k to improve access as well as safety and security aspects at Hampstead Heath swimming facilities.
 - Accessible pontoon added at Highams Pond.
- ii. **Improve inclusivity at our sites.**
 - New car parking charges included concessions for blue badge holders
 - Phone helpline set up to assist with swim bookings as an accessible alternative to online booking.
- iii. **Increase our collection and analysis of 'protected characteristics' data.**

- The two Commons Management plans and Epping Forest's Car Parking and Cycling consultations monitored protected characteristic data which was considered to ensure responses and outcomes were representative.
- iv. Develop our Learning programme offer to Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Schools (SEND).**
 - New programme provided during Lockdown for children with Autism.
 - Bespoke school programme set up for SEND schools within walking distance of sites, to support them during lockdowns.
- v. Implement the agreed transgender policy.**
 - Online transgender awareness training rolled out to all sites and ongoing regular work with Hampstead Heath lifeguards on transgender inclusivity.

Climate implications

23. Funding has been awarded to the Department to deliver Carbon Removal projects as part of the Climate Action Strategy.

Security implications - None

Conclusion

24. The Covid19 Pandemic impacted on the delivery of the 2020/21 Business Plan and achievement of performance measure targets. However, despite facilities being closed and resources predominantly having to focus on essential service delivery, a number of priority areas of work were progressed. The Department also closely managed its income and expenditure budgets and were only slightly overspent against its reset budget.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Business Plan 2020/21

Appendix 2 – Performance Measures 2020/21

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