

Committee(s): Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee	Date(s): 07 July 2022
Subject: Directors Report	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11 & 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N/A
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: Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director, Environment	For discussion
Report author: Sally Agass, interim Director of Natural Environment	

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on matters relating to the work of the Natural Environment Division of the Environment Department. A Directors report will become a standard item agenda to this committee going forward

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.
- Provide feedback on the draft Events Calendar (appendix 1).
- Provide feedback on the draft Monitoring and Reporting Dashboard (appendix 2).

Main Report

Charity Review

Members are asked to note that in conjunction with the Corporate Charity Review Group work has started to undertake this review and to bring recommendations back to this Committee.

The background to this matter is that in December 2020 Court of Common Council approved the creation of the Environment Department to be created and this came into force in April 2022. This Corporate Restructure included the Open Spaces Division to be included in the Environment Department but because of the complexity of the ten charities that form this division it was decided that Natural Environment Division

would not be included in the first Target Operating Model (TOM1) but would be a separate TOM2. Operational resourcing includes TOM2 and is part of the Charity Review. Other elements include:

- Governance
- Operational Resourcing
- Strategic
- Operational Finance

Events

At Members request a draft Events Calendar has been prepared and is attached for comment. Appendix 2.

This document will be updated and brought back to each Committee and if significant events are added, will be circulated to Members

Natural Environment Dashboard

At Members request a draft Natural Environment Dashboard has been prepared and is attached Appendix 1. This is work in progress and comments and suggestions are very welcome.

The items included are suggestions and each element will be expanded on in future Directors reports brought to this Committee.

Key News from our Charities

Epping Forest and The Commons

The Epping Forest car parking charging project has successfully completed Phases I & II yielding income of £360k for the 2021/22 financial year, with the final Phase III to be introduced across the summer of 2022. A second holiday let income project at Dannetts Hill is close to completion. The Forest, supported by staff from the Commons, hosted a successful familiarisation day for the DEFRA Animal Welfare Committee to evaluate the use of fenceless barrier systems for cattle. Contractors, costing £180k, have been used to address a growing backlog of tree safety issues associated largely with *Cryptostroma* or Sooty bark Disease. The North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) have introduced a revised Traffic Regulation Order to manage highway congestion parking within the Forest at High Beach.

Wanstead Flats Grassroots Football – Epping Forest and Football Foundation Officers are reviewing the feasibility of £4.5M Parklife project, designed to

improve football facilities at Harrow Road, which has been delayed by COVID-19 and an FA reorganisation, to examine value engineering in the face of significant building inflation costs.

Wanstead Park Lake Cascade – the project to address the Environment Agency's 'High Risk' designation for the four-lake cascade, including 3 Large Raised Reservoirs, has completed two study and modelling phases considering dam improvements and the interaction of the low-lying lakes with the adjacent River Roding. £1M of dam levelling and reinforcement is currently proposed from the £11M City Capital allocation. A further study is currently examining dam cohesion projections during prolonged dry periods.

Countryside Stewardship Grant bids - In addition to the current £1.1M, three further bids are being developed for the remainder of Epping Forest, Wanstead Park and Buffer Land centred on Copped Hall Park.

Carbon Recovery Project – following a detailed evaluation of carbon recovery options by external consultants, the cost-benefit of the scheme is being analysed ahead of representations to the Resource Allocation Sub-Committee.

Birch Hall Park Dam Repair Project – A ££280k scheme has been agreed with Kelson Highways to build an access road and repair the dam between August and September 2022.

Post-COVID path Repairs – after an evaluation by engineers a Gateway 1 proposal will be presented to Committee in September 2022.

Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common - The Walt Disney Film Production is now striking camp at Burnham Beeches after several weeks 'on location'. Income from this activity will exceed our budgeted target for the year so it should be possible to purchase vehicles to replace part of our small but aging fleet, as well as carry out some expensive ground's maintenance works such as the de-silting of Top and Middle ponds, that would otherwise be unaffordable. Buckinghamshire County Council have approved 4.5 miles of verge side parking restrictions on the public highways that pass through and around Burnham Beeches. This will help to protect the verges of the Special Area of Conservation and is helpful in the prevention of parking charge avoidance. The restrictions will be enforced by Buckinghamshire Council from October 2022. The 'larger landscape' partnership project with the National Trust, Dorney Wood Trust and Buckinghamshire County Council continues to make good progress. Biological surveys have now been completed on land immediately surrounding the Beeches SAC and it is of international importance. A summary report is being produced to set out the vision and aims of this ambitious, multi organisational, project together with associated costs. The report will be presented to this committee later in 2022. The Assistant Director and local Officers continue to work with Natural England and local landowners to seek ways to mitigate the impact of development in the Slough area upon the SAC. Slough Borough Council is currently bankrupt and without a Local Plan that properly consider the Burnham Beeches SAC. In the meantime, developers continue to make proposals to the Council that cannot be progressed, so solutions are being sought to allow both development and mitigation against harm to the SAC. Officers met recently with Summerleaze,

the owners of the neighbouring gravel extraction site and land fill site, and Natural England to consider the provision of a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to provide an adjacent recreational alternative to Burnham Beeches. A report on this matter will be presented once matters have progressed sufficiently.

The Coulsdon Commons - The Assistant Director recently met, at their direct request, with the Chairman and (ex) Vice Chairman of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) who are keen to ensure that the Coulsdon Commons are considered as part of the ongoing boundary change review of the AONB. The City Corporation contributed to the 'call for evidence' earlier this year in support of the inclusion of the Coulsdon Commons within the AONB boundary on landscape quality grounds. Full public consultation on the matter is to be held during 2023 at which point the proposals will be further considered by the Secretary of State. The Assistant Director will continue to liaise with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman for guidance until such time as a formal committee report is possible.

Hampstead Heath, Queens Park and High gate Woods

The East Heath Playground was refurbished and re-opened in late March 2022. A great fundraising campaign granted over 40K worth of funding that was donated by the community for the refurbishment of the Heath Extension Playground. Brent CIL funding of £45k granted to support the playground refurbishments at Queen's Park.

Successful Jubilee Celebrations were held at Golders Hill Park on 2nd June, in partnership with the London Borough of Brent and Queen's Park The events were well attended. Highgate Wood and Queen's Park have received Green flag commemorative plaques from Keep Britain Tidy, who manages the Green Flag Award scheme. In 2021, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park became two of only four sites who have retained the award every year since its launch 25 years before.

West Ham Park

A long-term and sustainable future for the former nursery site at West Ham Park and for the whole park continues to be a major priority for the West Ham Park Charity. Since 2015, the West Ham Park Committee has been evaluating the viability of alternative uses on the site of the former commercial nursery. The proposed option for the re-use of the nursery site, that 50% of the site be made available for residential development and 50% of the site be used for operational and community facilities plus additional public green space, was approved by Members in April 2021.

Acting as the Trustee of West Ham Park Charity, Members' approval is now sought to enter into a commercial agreement with the chosen developer

regarding the redevelopment of the former nursery site at West Ham Park, as detailed in a separate report to this Committee.

Learning

The learning and play programme at Hampstead Heath, Epping Forest and West Ham Park is thriving. Our school engagement levels are now higher than pre-pandemic levels, with schools keen to enrich children's learning through memorable outdoor experiences - nearly 9,000 school children are booked in for the summer term, compared with 8,600 in 2019. Based on the unique features of the sites, the programme provides rich opportunities to learn through first hand observation, see the relevance and application of knowledge and skills beyond the classroom, explore, be creative, and develop team working skills. There is great concern over the attainment gap between disadvantaged school students and their peers, and the learning programme has engaged schools in some of London's most deprived boroughs, including Tower Hamlets, Newman, Hackney, Islington, and Haringey.

The two play centres at Hampstead Heath are reaching children in some of the most deprived wards to the south of the Heath, including Gospel Oak Ward where there is 39% child poverty. Play is essential for children's wellbeing and development, and at a time of growing concern that opportunities for children to play in nature are becoming very limited, the play centres have an increasingly important role. Over April and May 3,228 children and adults have participated in our facilitated play sessions.

Other Matters – NON-PUBLIC

See Appendix 3.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

1. The facilitation role of this Committee ensures that projects and works delivered by our Charities contribute towards the achievement of the three aims set out in the City of London Corporate Plan 2018-23: Contribute to a flourishing society, Support a thriving economy and Shape outstanding environments.

Financial Implications

Not applicable at this time but will be reported to Committee as part of the Charity Review

Resource Implications

Not applicable at this time but will be reported to Committee as part of the Charity Review

Climate Implications

Not directly applicable

Legal Implications

Not applicable at this time but will be reported to Committee as part of the Charity Review

Risk Implications

A separate Report is included on the agenda.

Equality Implications

No impact.

Security Implications

Not applicable

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Natural Environment draft Events Calendar
- Appendix 2 – Natural Environment draft Dashboard
- Appendix 3 – Other Matters

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