

Natural Environment

Nature Recovery and Climate Resilience Strategy. 2022 – 2032

Executive Summary

1. Background and Strategic context.

The Open Spaces Department ‘shapes outstanding environments’ by long-term, expert custodianship of its open spaces and their particular biodiversity, across 4,500 hectares of open space within London and beyond. Every year millions of people visit our award-winning open spaces including the National Nature Reserves of Burnham Beeches in Buckinghamshire, Ashted Common and the South London Downs in Surrey, Epping Forest in Essex and Hampstead Heath. Two of these sites, Burnham Beeches and Epping Forest carry Special Area of Conservation status (SAC) recognising their international importance for rare and specific habitat types. All share common charitable and legislative objectives: *to preserve the open spaces for the recreational benefit of their users.*

In a country that has, over recent decades, recorded a devastating decline in once common species of flora and fauna, opportunities to experience the full spectrum of biodiversity once found in the English landscape, are rapidly diminishing. In that same time frame our appreciation and understanding has grown of the ‘hidden services’ the natural landscape provides such as clean air, water, carbon sequestration and storage, upon which all existence is based. There is a pressing need to better understand, value and protect these natural services to reflect their intrinsic worth.

Our open spaces have become sanctuaries for some of the UK’s rarest and most threatened species, which in itself is a lamentable reflection of the wider state of our environment. More positively each site can and must, play an important role in reversing the current ‘biodiversity loss crisis’, a challenge set out by the Environment Act, 2022. This can only be achieved by agreement of a clear and determined strategic approach thereby ensuring that future generations of all species, including our own, can thrive.

The strategic framework for the City’s open spaces is highlighted in the Open Spaces business plan 2021-22. [PowerPoint Presentation \(cityoflondon.gov.uk\)](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk). The strategy has wider objectives but lacks the detailed strategic approach identified above. The strategic approach should drive existing and future site specific management plans.

The City Corporation has recently set out its commitment to net zero carbon emission by 2027 for its operations, net zero by 2040 across the City Corporation’s ‘full value chain’, net zero by 2040 in the Square Mile and climate resilience in our buildings, public spaces and infrastructure. The City Corporation has publicly committed to do this through major investment in energy efficiency at our investment and corporate properties, aligning its investment portfolio with the Paris Agreement, enhancing carbon removal in our open spaces, protecting our shared natural resources, driving net zero through our supply chain and integrating climate considerations into all our decision. [Climate Action Strategy 2020-2027 \(sharepoint.com\)](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk)

Whilst the City has produced a Biodiversity Action Plan for those Parks and Gardens within its local authority function a truly open spaces wide strategic approach to nature recovery and climate resilience is needed to provide a golden thread with other Corporate and Natural Environment strategies.

2. Vision/Commitment.

We will protect and ~~preserve~~ **conserve**, thriving rural and urban green spaces at the heart of wider, interconnected natural landscapes, maximising their potential to ~~permanently~~ enhance

permanently their biodiversity value, and ecosystem services, are sequestration and storage of carbon and climate change resilience and remove/sequester carbon.

3. Who we are.

The Natural Environment Division forms part of the City of London Corporation's Environment Department. Comprising 3 core open spaces (sub- Divisions) covering around ~~11,000 acres~~ 4,500 hectares. Each is of immense and growing local, regional and national importance for biodiversity.

4. Why us.

We are required to protect the green spaces through a variety of Acts and regional/national designations such as Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Area of Conservation (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regs, 2017), Metropolitan Open Land & Greenbelt, Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 as well as our own founding Open Spaces Acts. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, places upon the City (as a local authority) the duty to have regard for conserving biodiversity. The Environment Act 2021, seeks to halt the decline of species by 2030 and will set clear targets for land managers to achieve this.

Our geographic spread around London and the Home Counties and diverse range of natural assets, affords a wide sphere of influence with those who manage land around us. Our ability to sequester and store carbon places us at the heart of City's Climate Action Strategy.

Our lands, purchased under various Acts of Parliament, are protected in perpetuity and play key roles as nuclei of biodiversity and potential inoculum of wider landscapes. Buffer lands whilst not protected in the same manner, have scope to generate additional income to support our vision and will play an essential, long term role in our future carbon reduction and nature recovery activities.

5. Who we will work with (and how we will complement others efforts)

We recognise the importance of working with common aims across the portfolio of open spaces and with a wide range of national, regional and local partners to maximise (our) efforts to address the regional, national and global biodiversity and climate crises.

6. Aims

a) Spaces under the Act

- i. Protect and enhance existing biodiversity within our current ownership boundaries, in perpetuity
- ii. Look beyond existing ownership boundaries and:
 - i. Forge clear links between the CoL Climate Action Strategy and 'wider' Nature Recovery and Climate Action Plans.
 - ii. To the greatest extent possible, seek partnerships with external bodies to support their strategies, policies and plans' for local nature recovery' and the restoration of wider, wilder landscapes
 - iii. Seek additional funding to achieve the above e.g. ELMS, S106 etc.
- iii. Balance biodiversity net gain against competing green space strategies such as visitor access, commercial activity, health and wellbeing, heritage, learning and information.
- iv. Use (where possible) minimum intervention techniques, including extensive grazing, to enhance biodiversity, reduce our carbon footprint and use of resources.

b) Buffer lands

Use existing/acquire additional buffer lands to:

- i. Protect existing ('designated'?) sites and provide opportunities for habitats and species to expand via permeable boundaries into the wider landscape

- ii. Provide visitor gateways to our protected landscapes thereby reducing pressures on biodiversity
- iii. Sequester carbon balanced with opportunities for biodiversity enhancement
- iv. Provide additional support to the City's Climate Action strategy and associated targets
- v. Generate additional income through potential change in use to mitigate the ownership costs of buffer lands and our wider nature recovery and climate action ambitions

c) All Land

- i. Strengthen the strategic approach strategy to nature recovery within the Corporate Plan and Environment Dept – **a golden thread to Corporate and Natural Environment strategies**
- ii. Work with Local Planning Authorities, Natural England and other external bodies to mitigate the impact of urban development on the biodiversity of the green spaces.
- iii. Use outcomes of planned development to financially support the wider ambitions of this strategy

7. What needs to change to achieve this strategy?

- i. Our ambition, confidence and influence
- ii. Corporate plan – to fully reflect biodiversity and climate crises
- iii. Funding and resources - to refocus or increase capacity
- iv. Reduce introspection/silo working
- v. Increase outreach to other organisations (with similar ambitions?)
- vi. Public understanding of the Biodiversity and Climate Change crises and the changing/conflicting purposes of the open spaces
- vii. **An effective, 'softer' communications strategy that reflects the aims of each charity and their roles to combat climate change and biodiversity loss**

8. How does this strategy balance against competing strategies

The Natural Environment Division is developing a series of separate strategies to lead its main service delivery activities. These will sometimes complement each other but there will be occasions when they compete. Each strategy needs to acknowledge the existence of and link to, the others and seek balanced solutions to potential conflicting needs.

9. Outcomes (of the strategy showing the intended impact we want to make)

- i. Permanently conserved and protected green spaces.
- ii. Improved links with other organisations (etc)
- iii. Monitoring programmes including carrying capacity studies, visitor numbers, biodiversity data, soil, ecosystem services etc
- iv. Permeable, linked landscapes beyond our boundaries with shared management principles enabling species migration across ownership frontiers
- v. Richer, resilient more biodiverse open spaces
- vi. Enhanced carbon sequestration and storage
- vii. Stabilised and improving ecosystem services **whose value is understood financially**
- viii. Creation/acceptance of minimal intervention landscapes where deemed appropriate i.e. reliant on natural processes to deliver biodiversity, ecosystem and carbon management services
- ix. **An expanded land ownership portfolio where necessary**

- x. Guiding policies and a portfolio of 'local' projects to attract funding such as BNG, S106, CIL, ELMS, Voluntary Giving etc.
- xi. **A code of ethics**

10. Corporate Plan links

This strategy supports the following Corporate Aim:

'Shaping Outstanding Environments'

- 11. We have clean air, land and water and a thriving natural environment**
Our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained

11. What success looks like

- i. **This strategy links clearly to wider Corporate and Natural Environment strategies so that** the organisation understands the long term value/benefits of supporting ~~this strategy~~ **Nature Recovery and Climate Resilience activities.**
- ii. All designated sites are protected by an active land acquisition policy providing buffers and where necessary, visitor gateways
- iii. **Each open space contributes to the strategy in a manner that reflects their different opportunities, challenges and potential**
- iv. We have effective communications - our sites and management activities are understood by its various audiences.
- v. We have a robust data set to inform consistent management decisions
- vi. We have clear hierarchy of strategic need
- vii. We have access to the skills/expertise we need **and the resources to support them**
- viii. We have sufficient resources to meet our new ambitions.
- ix. Additional income generation directly funds those ambitions
- x. Detailed aims, targets, outcomes and measures within local management plans
- xi. Biodiversity is flourishing across ownership boundaries and able to adapt to climate change
- xii. **Members have access to strategic information in a form that ensures progress can be reviewed easily and effectively**

12. Resource needs and other implications

- i. **Funding for:**
 - i. Acceleration of existing biodiversity enhancement work programmes
 - ii. Land acquisitions
 - iii. Partnership work 'contributions'
 - iv. New skills/expertise within teams (or access to external expertise)
 - v. Establishment of improved baseline data
 - vi. Extensive data gathering and long term monitoring programmes
- ii. **People**
 - i. Strengthened ecological expertise – currently very thinly spread
 - ii. Strengthened planning/development expertise
 - iii. Strengthened climate change knowledge
 - iv. **Strengthened income generation expertise**
- iii. **Communications**
 - i. Improved, **charity focussed**, marketing and comms to enhance funding and mitigate public issues/concern e.g. due to competing strategies
 - ii. Clear links to competing strategies and hierarchy of need
 - iii. A fit for purpose web site and social media freedoms.