

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queens Park Committee	Date(s): 17 th May 2023
Subject: Executive 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 information
Report author: Juliemma McLoughlin Executive Director Environment	

Summary

This report provides the Committee Members with an update on matters relating to the work of the Natural Environment Division of the Environment Department since the last Committee in February 2023.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report.
- Provide feedback on the contents of the report

Main Report

Charity Review

Members will be aware that the Epping Forest and Commons Committee held an Awayday on the 17 February. At the Awayday, there was extensive discussion on the developing Natural Environment Strategy which was presented in draft form. In addition, there was a detailed update on the various on-site projects and challenges at Epping Forest and the Commons. The draft NE Strategy is now brought together in an overarching document which will be used as a basis for consultation with key partners.

Members will also be aware, that the Corporate Charities Review (CCR) secured funding from Finance Committee to continue the CCR and additionally to support the Natural Environment Division in 23/24 with the review of its charities. The Natural Environment Charity Review (NECR) was previously scoped under four broad themes but following a review session with the NECR working group comprising the CCR, the NECR will be rescoped. The scoping exercise, beginning with Epping Forest (232990) and Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common (232987), will focus on each charity in turn to develop charity specific and general recommendations, this approach has been successful with the CCR. A joint CCR/NECR report will be presented to your July Committees.

The initial focus of the NECR was on governance aspects, notably seeking to address the concern over a lack of clarity over the role and remit of the various Committees, which has been a longstanding concern. Following Officer consultation, it is considered these concerns should be incorporated and explored as part of the current scoping exercise. Accordingly, there will be no imminent change to Terms of Reference of the four Natural Environment Committees, though there is to be a name change for the Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee.

Changes to descriptors on the Charity Commission website have now been made, which should provide a clearer understanding of the full range of activities and functions. It is hoped that this will also help in the charities' fundraising efforts.

Key News from our Charities

Epping Forest

The exceptionally dry February, followed by unseasonably wet March, has seen some immediate Forest impacts, including high numbers of Winter Moth species suggesting that there will another spring population irruption event and localised defoliation in the Forest. The rapid rewetting of trees in March also led to some significant branch and trees collapses, more in keeping with the phenomenon of Summer Branch Drop (SBD). The impact of Storm Noa (12 April) passing largely to the south of London did not bring extensive damage, other than some tree plate collapses in areas of super-saturated ground. On 24 March, the Risk Register for tree failure was temporarily increased from a score of 24 to 32 to recognise a continuing risk with tree affecting power lines over the M25, which will be addressed during a forthcoming M25 part closure on 12 May. Heavy rain in February and March has seen the high-water table in the Forest flooding some paths and low-lying areas. The early Easter and continuing ground saturation has seen a postponement of the reopening of the Forest to Open Riding.

Conservation Teams have continued to work on the Countryside Stewardship Forest #2 applications, postponing work on Copped Hall and Wanstead Park applications until 2024 to enable work on the latest carbon sequestration evaluation by external consultants. Work on Wood Pasture restoration has continued alongside a continued

focus on reducing the overall numbers of hazardous trees, ahead of the February/March 2023 assessment of red and amber zone trees

The Commons

A highlight during the reporting period has been to see Burnham Beeches featured in the much-anticipated BBC documentary Wild Isles. In the Woodland episode, the infamous southern wood ants of the Beeches can be seen in a four-and-a-half-minute story which sees the ants' hunting caterpillars and harvesting honeydew from aphids. Farthing Downs featured in a Time Out article reporting on the proposed expansion of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and where Farthing Downs is proposed for inclusion which would give London its first AONB. Farthing Downs along with other City Corporation chalk grassland areas have been identified as one of eleven priority zone in the Mayor of London's 'Rewilding London' report that came out in March.

Arborist staff from Hampstead Heath shared their specialist skills and knowledge to help with installing new props on some of the ancient trees at Burnham Beeches, with the aim of extending the trees' lives for as long as possible, reducing the risk of them collapsing and helping to bridge the gap between the young and ancient pollards. Burnham Beeches played host to arboriculture consultants, university lecturers and tree managers from The Polish Tree Institute who came to study our propping techniques, rootzone management practices and risk management to keep our ancient pollards alive as long as possible.

Volunteers have undertaken 2675 hours of work during Feb and March across the Commons and they have been vital for implementing aspect of our Countryside Stewardship Scheme programme, including hedge laying at Spring Park and chalk downland management. One volunteer also facilitated the planting of two disease resistant elm trees as part of the Elms4London campaign on Spring Park and West Wickham Common. We are hugely grateful to the West Wickham Rotary club who kindly donated and planted an abundance of hazel 'whips' at West Wickham Common in March

Following quite an extensive fly survey of Ashtead Common 431 species have been identified, 26 of which are of conservation concern including some classified as vulnerable, UK Priority and a few new records for the country. This makes Ashtead Common a site important on at least a national level.

West Ham Park – Former Nursery Site

The commercial agreement with the preferred developer of the former nursery site is not yet finalised and pre-application discussion with LB Newham and relevant statutory agencies is on-going.

Learning

The learning programme has engaged 38,034 participants at Epping Forest, Hampstead Heath and West Ham Park (April 2022 – March 2023).

- 17,868 students participated in our school programme, which reached children in London's most deprived boroughs, including Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney, Waltham Forest and Haringey. Schools took part in facilitated workshops that support the National Curriculum and boost fusion skills, wellbeing and connection to nature.
- 19,868 people participated in our play programme at Hampstead Heath, with visitors enjoying activities which promoted social skills, physical fitness, confidence and wellbeing.
- 150 people participated in our community programme, including groups from Ambition Aspire Achieve and Chance UK.
- 90 people participated in our youth programme, including a pre-apprenticeship work experience programme for school students at risk of exclusion, careers events, and long-term programmes for pupil referral units.

The learning team hosted a climate education conference at the Guildhall, bringing together teachers and researchers to develop best practice in climate education. The alliance will work together to change today's education for tomorrow's climate, equipping people with the knowledge and skills to take climate action and protect the environment.

Projects Update

Natural Environment Strategy: Previous strategy work across key themes affecting Natural Environment has been combined in a single draft document. The combined document is being cross-referenced with all open space management plans and informed by current research on natural capital.

Monument: A feasibility study in relation to a Monument Visitor Centre, which could be delivered with a development partner through the Planning process, is underway and is due for completion in April 2023.

Wanstead Park: The Wanstead Park Ponds project is progressing towards Gateway 5, whilst a grant application to the GLA to support a prospective SUDs project at the park was rejected. Alternative funding options are now being explored. The activities at the Grotto and Landing Stage have been combined into a single project, with new project governance and documentation in place.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

All 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.

A key strategic link is the Climate Action Strategy, and we work with the Departmental and Corporate teams to deliver those elements allocated to the Natural Environment Department,

Financial Implications

Not applicable

Resource Implications

Not directly applicable

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

Not applicable

Equality Implications

No impact.

Security Implications

Not applicable

Appendices

None

Juliemma McLoughlin
Executive Director Environment

E: juliemma.mcloughlin@cityoflondon.gov.uk