

Committee(s): Natural Environment Board Streets and Walkways Sub Committee	Dated: 10 July 2023 26 Sept 2023
Subject: Commemorative Benches and Trees Policy	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Contribute to a flourishing society Shape outstanding environments
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	NO
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: The Interim Executive Director	For Decision
Report author: Jake Tibbetts – Environment	

Summary

1. The Commemorative Benches and Trees Policy aims to formalize the existing offer for benches and trees in City Gardens and Public Realm. It includes details on bench type, plaque, location, ownership, and aftercare. The policy also aims to improve the process and make applications easier through the introduction of a dedicated webpage. Commemorative trees will no longer be offered, but opportunities for tree planting contributions will be explored separately.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that:

- Members approve the adoption of the draft Commemorative Benches and Trees Policy (see Appendix 1)

Main Report

Background

2. The City Gardens team have for many years dealt with requests for commemorative benches and trees on an ad-hoc basis without a formal policy in place. This paper proposes the adoption of a policy which will formalise and standardise both the offer and the application process.

3. There has been a long tradition of placing benches with an engraving or a plaque in the Square Mile's public realm, parks, gardens and churchyards to commemorate loved ones or mark a special event.

In the past there has been an ad hoc approach for managing commemorative trees which has sometimes evolved into a more strategic approach to for initiatives such as the Queen's Green Canopy scheme.

4. The management of these schemes across City Gardens and the Public Realm has sometimes been inconsistent and the process for applicants has been unclear. It is proposed that a coherent unified Policy will provide clarity and consistency.

Current Position

5. The City Gardens team are responsible for approximately 270 benches across the Square Mile and Bunhill Fields typically located in parks, gardens and churchyards. The replacement and maintenance of these benches is currently met through City Fund revenue budgets or as part of a capital improvement project.
6. Requests for commemorative benches within gardens are processed by the City Gardens Team. The current price is £1,300 which covers the cost of purchasing, installing and maintaining a bench and plaque.
7. Typically most requests are for one of four popular sites. St Paul's, Postman's Park, St Dunstan in the East and Bunhill Fields. There are few suitable bench locations remaining in these popular sites with the largest gardens typically able to accommodate less than twenty benches in total. There is no current waiting list.
8. There are 127 existing historic commemorative trees managed by City Gardens either with or without an associated plaque. The management of this has proved challenging in the past due to holding historic personal data and the added level of complexity when redesigning gardens and public spaces.
9. Current requests for commemorative trees are infrequent and increasingly difficult to accommodate due to high pedestrian footfall adjacent to trees on the Highways, meaning that accommodating plaques at the base of a tree in a safe and secure way is problematic. In addition to this there are challenges around trees dying or maintaining a database and register of sponsored trees.
10. Currently commemorative trees are not offered and any enquiries from members of the public are provided with details of opportunities for a commemorative bench.

Options

Members are asked to agree one of the following options:

11. Option 1: continue considering commemorative bench and tree requests on an ad-hoc basis (not recommended)
12. Option 2: approve the adoption of the draft Commemorative Benches and Trees Policy (recommended)

Proposals

13. The Policy aims to formalise the details of the existing offer including type of bench and plaque available to purchase, how locations are offered, duration the bench remains in place, ownership, and aftercare.
14. The Commemorative Benches and Trees Policy is detailed in Appendix 1. The Policy formalises the offer a 1.95m bench with a standard stainless-steel plaque. Attaching a new plaque to an existing bench is not offered. Two centralised arm rests are included to provide support to users and increase accessibility.
15. The locations offered are typically parks, gardens and churchyards in the Square Mile managed by the City Gardens team plus Bunhill Fields. New commemorative benches typically replace existing, undedicated benches as suitable positions for benches are usually fully occupied. Sponsors usually have a preferred site in mind and are informed of the specific locations within the garden available. Benches may be temporarily or permanently relocated at any time due to operational reasons. Benches are placed to provide good clearance for both users and for staff to carry out operational tasks.
16. The fee to sponsor a bench with a commemorative plaque will be £1,980. The fee covers the placing of a bench with inscribed plaque, administration and will fund a second bench to be placed in the City where most needed.
17. The bench will be maintained for a minimum of ten years and replaced by the City if it is damaged beyond repair within that time.
18. The proposed fee has been benchmarked against other central London local authorities or similar organisations (Appendix 2). The fee will be reviewed and agreed annually as part of the City Gardens Fees and Charges committee report.
19. The adoption of the Policy will also be accompanied by a new webpage on the City of London Corporation's website to detail the opportunity to sponsor a commemorative bench. There will also be an updated audit to identify existing commemorative benches and opportunities for new ones.
20. The Policy removes the opportunity to sponsor commemorative trees with a plaque. In exceptional circumstances any proposed commemorative trees are to be approved by this Committee.

21. Opportunities are to be explored where individuals and organisations can sponsor tree planting in the Square Mile and for this contribution to be acknowledged, with the potential to develop an online site with map showing trees that have been sponsored and sponsors details. This will be reported to committee at a later date.
22. The criteria for applying for a commemorative bench will be:
 - For someone who has died
 - Who has a connection with the city
23. The inscription on the plaque:
 - has to be in English
 - will not detail how someone has died
 - give their name, date of birth and date of death and can include a short sentence such as “in loving memory of”, “they will be missed”, “who loved this park”.
24. The wording will ultimately be approved by the City Gardens Manager.

Key Data

25. The City Gardens team has provided and installed on average three commemorative benches per year over the last five years. The aim of the Policy would be to assist with accelerating the bench replacement programme to target eighteen benches per year to maintain a good provision of well-placed benches through our sites.
26. City Gardens manage 270 benches, which have an estimated life expectancy of 15 years but with many remaining in good condition well beyond this time. To ensure that we maintain our stock of benches we should be replacing approximately eighteen a year. Through projects, sponsorship and maintenance budgets we currently replace on average eight a year, leaving a shortfall. This draft Policy aims to reduce that shortfall.

Strategic implications

27. Contributing towards creating accessible, well maintained and inviting open spaces supports a number of key City of London Corporate Plan outcomes:
28. Contribute to a flourishing society: 1) People are safe and feel safe, 2) People enjoy good health and wellbeing.
29. Shape outstanding environments: 9) We are digitally and physically well-connected and responsive, 10) We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration, 12) Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained.
30. The Policy supports actions of the City Gardens Management Plan and Bunhill Fields Burial Ground Management Plan.

Financial implications

31. The adoption of this policy will increase the amount of benches replaced each year without impacting on revenue budgets.

Resource implications N/A

Legal implications N/A

Risk implications N/A

Equalities implications

32. The policy has a positive effect on equalities as the style of bench that has been chosen, and in use for a number of years, has been selected for seat to be a higher more suitable height. The outside and centralised arms assist with users transferring to and from the bench for those with mobility issues or visual impaired. Many existing older benches are positioned too low and do not have the centralised arms, replacing the old benches for the new model will improve accessibility.

Climate implications N/A

Security implications N/A

Conclusion

33. The Policy (see appendix 1) formalises the current approach for managing requests for commemorative benches and trees within City Gardens managed sites and a limited number of agreed locations on the highway. Its adoption will provide a consistent approach to bench sponsorship throughout the square mile.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – draft Commemorative Benches and Trees Policy
- Appendix 2 – Fee benchmarking

Background Papers

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