

Committee: Natural Environment Board – For Decision	Dated: 16 Oct 2023
Subject: Bunhill Fields Combined Management Plan	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1/2/4/11/12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	
Report of: Bob Roberts, Interim Executive Director Environment	For Decision
Report author: Jake Tibbetts - Environment	

Summary

Bunhill Fields is a very important site historically and environmentally and provides an important resource to the local community around it. A Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was developed in 2020 through consultation with key stakeholder, this provides guidance for the site’s custodians through appropriate conservation, regeneration and ecological management.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Endorse the Bunhill Fields Burial Ground Conservation Management Plan as a resource to guide management, and to enable the development of a City Gardens operational plan.

Main Report

Background

1. Bunhill Fields Burial Ground is England’s foremost non-conformist burial ground. Although located within the London Borough of Islington, it is owned and managed by City of London Corporation. The burial ground survives as 1.6 hectares (3.5 acres) of tranquil public memorial garden on the fringe of the City of London.

2. Its importance is recognised by multiple designations. It is located within the Bunhill Fields / Finsbury Square Conservation Area and included at Grade I on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. There are numerous listed structures (8 list entries at Grade II* and 68 list entries at Grade II, including the boundary walls and railings). The site is also listed as a Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation (SBINC). In addition to its heritage and ecological value, the burial ground is a highly-valued amenity for local residents, City workers and other local interest groups.
3. First enclosed in 1665, the current layout of Bunhill Fields Burial Ground was developed in two main phases. The first of these was in the 1860s, when the City of London improved the site. This involved laying out paths, undertaking tree planting and carrying out work to the tombs. In the 1960s the northern part of the site was re-designed as a public garden by Sir Peter Shepheard, one of the foremost landscape architects of the period. The southern area remains dominated by the memorials, fenced off from public access by metal railings.
4. The burial ground contains 2,333 monuments, mostly simple headstones, of which there are 1,920, arranged in a grid formation. Many of the graves are packed closely together, giving an idea of how London's burial places looked before large cemeteries further from the centre of London opened from the 1830s onwards. At the time of closing of this ground in 1852 more than 120,000 bodies had been interred there.
5. Bunhill Fields is the largest public greenspace site within the electoral ward of Bunhill within Islington, providing an important natural resource to the local community. It has rich biodiversity and the site is managed with the help of local volunteers.
6. Purcell were commissioned in November 2019 to liaise with key stakeholders and prepare a review of the CMP for Bunhill Fields Burial Ground. The production of the CMP was overseen by its Project Board, which included representatives of the City Gardens Team, and the Heritage Estate Section (City Surveyor's Department), but also key external stakeholders: Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service, Historic England, London Borough of Islington, Friends of City Gardens, City of London Guides, London Parks & Gardens Trust, London Wildlife Trust, Natural England, The Blake Society, The Lyceum School.

Current Position

7. Bunhill Fields Burial Ground: Conservation Management Plan (CMP) is provided in full, at Appendix 1 and outlined below.
8. The aim of producing the CMP was to provide guidance for the site's custodians through appropriate conservation, regeneration and ecological management over the coming years. It is envisaged to be primarily an internal document, which will benefit those involved with managing the site and planning proposals for change.
9. The purpose of the CMP is to:

- a. Act as a convenient and accessible repository of information about the site's history and development
- b. Provide a balanced assessment of the cultural significance of the site – encompassing its heritage interests, ecological value and public amenity - which will underpin future decisions about change.
- c. Develop a consensus amongst stakeholders about the significance of the site
- d. Guide the future conservation, management and maintenance of the burial ground
- e. Provide guidance for the management team for the next ten years
- f. Suggest actions and projects that the City of London could take forward to meet its vision for the site
- g. Help to clarify consent procedures for works to listed buildings and protected trees.
- h. The scope of the CMP is the entirety of Bunhill Fields Burial Ground. This includes:
 - built fabric: memorials, walls, railings and gates, paths; buildings and site furniture and signage;
 - natural landscape: trees, lawn, shrubberies

Options

10. Endorse the CMP which provides a framework and guidance on the management and conservation of Bunhill Fields.

Proposals

11. Volume 1 of the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) sets out the site's chronological development in Section 2. Section 3 assesses what is significant about it in terms of its fabric, history, associations, layout, communal value, ecological significance and historic use. For the purposes of this assessment the site is divided into a number of character areas. Section 4 identifies Issues and opportunities for each of these areas. These underpin heritage policies in Section 5 of the CMP. Section 6 and Section 7 contain an Action Plan and a Maintenance Plan, respectively.
12. The Gazetteer in Volume Two provides more detailed information about each of the character areas, including the four burial enclosures, the public garden, pathways and boundary walls.
13. This Conservation Management Plan puts forward a vision for the burial ground that would, if adopted:
 - a. conserve its essential character as a rare surviving inner-city burial ground with unsurpassed evidence for the cramped appearance of Georgian metropolitan burial grounds
 - b. interpret its role as the pre-eminent historic non-conformist burial ground in England
 - c. enhance its ecological potential whilst respecting the essential aesthetic qualities of the site

- d. balance the various significances it holds – both ecological and heritage
- e. enhance public access and experience without disturbing the tranquillity of the site
- f. provide an amenity which is safe, resilient and well maintained.

14. The CMP provides a management plan which City Gardens can implement in conjunction with the Friends of City Gardens.

15. Once adopted City Surveyors and City Gardens can use the CMP to seek funding to achieve aims set in the Action Plan. The annual Cyclical Works Programme (CWP) bidding provides an opportunity for several of the actions to be considered for future funding.

16. The CMP lists opportunities which are categorised into seven key headings:

- Access & interpretation
- Buildings & monuments
- Landscape design
- Archaeology
- Ecology & wildlife
- Management & resources
- Sustainability

17. Within the CMP there is an action plan, which for the purposes of this report is informative. Once the CMP is adopted officers will focus on prioritising these actions and together with the identified maintenance activities, will build a sustainable funding strategy to sit alongside the plan to facilitate its long-term implementation. The funding strategy should highlight the various potential funding streams be it existing budgets, CWP, CIL, capital bids or external sources.

18. Of the 27 actions three are categorised as essential these being:

- B5 Monument repairs and conservation
- C1 Structural survey of the central east-west path
- C2 Repairs to the paths within the enclosures

19. The £123,000 of funding for B5 has been secured through the CWP and is currently ongoing. A further commitment of 50k per annum is detailed in the forward maintenance plans addressing the on-going planned conservation works of monuments and will be subject to a bid to the CWP at the appropriate time.

20. A CWP bidding request of 70k has been made across the next three financial years to address investigations and repair work noted under action C1.

21. Another CWP funding bid in the sum of 40k in financial year 24/25 has been made to address path repairs with the enclosures (Action C2).

22. The bidding requests for C1 & C2 are still subject to committee approval and funding being confirmed.

23. In total there are current bids in the CWP totalling 540k over the next three years for Bunhill Fields.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

24. The Bunhill Fields CMP aligns clearly with the following objectives:

- 4. Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need.*
- 11. We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment.*
- 12. Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained*

Financial implications

25. The annual CWP bidding provides an opportunity for a number of the actions arisen from the CMP to be considered for future funding.

26. Therefore, works resulting from the site's statutory protection and need to manage health and safety, must be captured in the prioritisation exercise undertaken for the whole CWP which is carried out annually.

Resource implications

27. The site is managed by the city Gardens team with the assistance of the Friends of City Gardens. Any objectives within the CMP that would require additional resource to deliver will be factored into the relevant funding bid.

Legal implications

28. Currently, the owners of listed buildings are under no legal obligation to maintain their property in a good state of repair, even though it is in their interests to do so. Local planning authorities and Historic England can, however, take action to secure repair when it becomes evident that a building is being allowed to deteriorate.

Risk implications

29. If the CMP is not implemented and appropriate maintenance work is not carried out, the Burial Ground will inevitably deteriorate which may lead to increased H&S concerns and repair costs, as well as reputational risk to the CoL.

Equalities implications –

30. Whilst the CMP outlines the need for improvement in signage and details improvements that can be made, such as accessible paths that will make the site more accessible to all.

Climate implications

31. Extreme weather events will continue to impact on heritage assets particularly those that are within open spaces, landscapes, highways, parks, and gardens –

like Bunhill Fields Burial Ground. Hence it is critical to have these sites cyclically surveyed and appropriately maintained.

32. Green infrastructure improvements that will be carried out in line with the CMP will be climate resilient and the tree strategy will consider the climate resilience of the current tree stock and how it can be improved.

Security implications - None

Conclusion

33. Bunhill Fields is a very important site historically and environmentally and provides an important resource to the community around it.

34. The CMP prepared by Purcell, in consultation with key stakeholders, draws together an extensive body of research and identified a medium-term strategy that could with the correct fundraising strategy provide guidance for the site's custodians through appropriate conservation, regeneration and ecological management, and therefore "Protect, curate and promote world-class heritage assets' as per the Corporate Plan.

35. It is therefore proposed that the plan be adopted as a resource to guide the investment decisions and fundraising planning of the site.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Bunhill CMP Volume1

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