

**Progress against key workstreams 2023-24**  
**1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024**

Ref:	Workstream	Progress 2023-24
1.	Refine the elements of the Natural Environment Charity Review for approval, working with the Comptroller and City Solicitor and the Corporate Charity Review Group to ensure each charity is fit for purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NECR is a transformation project seeking improvements to the NE charities that will facilitate changes ensuring the charities can operate in a self-determining and financially secure way into the future.</li> <li>• Between July 2023 and March 2024, the NECR identified, via a cross departmental officer Task and Finish group highlighting 22 areas of improvement for the charities.</li> <li>• In this period 14 workstreams were completed, with 8 still in progress which will inform or relate to further planned work.</li> <li>• During the scoping phase, more systematic areas of challenge were identified which would require further funding and expertise.</li> <li>• Since March 2024 the NECR has moved into development phase, further expanding the issues and potential solutions to those fundamental problems for the charities uncovered during scoping.</li> </ul>
2.	Embed the transformation plans for Phase Two of the Target Operating Model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase Two of the Target Operating Model has been implemented across the Natural Environment Division. All staff at risk of redundancy have been redeployed and the majority of the vacancies have been filled or are currently being recruited to.</li> <li>• A series of workshops for NE Division staff will be held in June and July to give officers the opportunity to feed back what is working well, what isn't working well and where there are staffing gaps and/or overlaps. This feedback will be reviewed by the NE Leadership Team who will make recommendations accordingly.</li> </ul>
3.	Ensure the safety of our buildings and assets by collaborating with the City Surveyor's Department on the Operational Property Review to prioritise and carry out essential repairs and maintenance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Corporation has approved funding to address the significant maintenance backlog, including of the Natural Environment Division's built assets. Officers are working closely with colleagues in the City Surveyor's Department (CSD) formally assess, allocate and prioritise the funding allocated to the Environment Department to areas of most need.</li> <li>• A condition survey of high-priority lodges was undertaken and work is underway to feed back the findings and prioritise work internally and with CSD.</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A full review of Natural Environment assets is underway. The outcome will be the compilation of a comprehensive, accurate asset register which will enable us to identify ownership of our assets.</li> <li>• A Charity Asset Officer is under recruitment as part of the Natural Environment Charity Review (NECR) to ensure assets are recorded correctly and consistently. Value and condition may form part of that project.</li> <li>• Officers also continue to seek alternative funding or other opportunities to enable repair and maintenance works to be undertaken outside the Cyclical Works Programme (CWP).</li> </ul>
4.	Further develop, and commence implementation of, the core Natural Environment strategies in line with Corporate strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The four Natural Environment Strategies have been finalised, were launched at the Natural Environment Board Dinner in January 2023 have been shared on our public-facing website. These strategies are being implemented through the development and delivery of business plans for each Charity; a new business plan template has been produced which enables recording of which of the 4 strategies each project/workstream contributes to.</li> </ul>
5.	Continue to progress the Carbon Removals project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project was rescoped in autumn 2023 and approved by Policy and Resources Committee in January 2024: delivery of the rescoped project is now underway.</li> <li>• Late in 2023 consultants began to prepare details on the new added element of the project: “Basine protection”, i.e. protecting our habitats’ carbon sequestration capacity. This work is expected to complete between April and August 2024.</li> <li>• The process to recruit a new Carbon Removal Project Manager commenced in March 2024.</li> </ul>
6.	Develop income generating activities and continue to investigate further opportunities for funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Assistant Director Charities and Development is leading on analysis of extant income streams and priority rating of new or extended funding sources for the Natural Environment charities. This will support the developing Charity Review and Fundraising Strategy.</li> <li>• At the North London Open Spaces (NLOS), recruitment for a Head of Development and Partnerships will proceed in April 2024; the new postholder will then recruit a Business Development Officer.</li> <li>• NLOS officers are exploring the ability to partner with third-party providers to expand the filming and wedding offer and associated income; and have set goals to increase commercial event income during FY' 2024-25.</li> </ul>

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7.	Review digitalisation of services to achieve efficiency gains.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North London Open Spaces is procuring/building a replacement booking system for swimming operations. This will simplify the existing system, improve customer experience, and minimise overhead costs.</li> <li>• Other developments under consideration include a new online platform for the Constabulary to capture and analyse data; and a system to streamline the administration of commercial dog walking licences on Hampstead Heath.</li> </ul>
8.	Develop Gift Aid system for the Natural Environment Charities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hampstead Heath Charity and Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Charity are able to receive Gift Aid if donations are made through Just Giving which is able to collect Gift Aid on the charities' behalf from HMRC. Once the new Head of Development and Partnerships has been appointed, the scheme will be extended to West Ham Park.</li> <li>• Epping Forest has completed registration for Gift Aid and is embedding this functionality into the existing CRM system for donations and other income streams where applicable.</li> </ul>
9.	Support the development of volunteer skills, networks and confidence, and improve volunteer wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is recognised that much of this work is undertaken by third party/partner organisations.</li> <li>• North London Open Spaces is in the process of renewing the agreement with Heath Hands, which delivers numerous and voluminous benefits such as a varied programme of walks, talks, training workshops and social events runs throughout the year.</li> <li>• West Ham Park has an ongoing commitment to work with volunteers via the Friends of West Ham Park.</li> </ul>
10.	Epping Forest: complete the Countryside Stewardship Scheme application for remaining Forest Buffer Lands and Wanstead Park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the year, work focussed on submitting a Countryside Stewardship Scheme application for the second half of Epping Forest.</li> <li>• The plan for Copped Hall was clarified.</li> <li>• An application for the Buffer Lands is still planned and will proceed when resources are available to do so.</li> <li>• Initial work needs to be carried out on the Wanstead Park project before a CSS application can be made.</li> </ul>
11.	Work with local partners on the inclusion of Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common within an extended Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has not yet made any progress with its boundary review.</li> </ul>

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Ref:	Workstream	Progress 2023-24
12.	Continue to work closely with stakeholders on the Burnham Beeches landscape scale habitat management programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership meetings continued to be held during the year, with a draft Memorandum of Understanding circulated for development in 2024/25.</li> </ul>
13.	The Burnham Beeches Team will work with Buckinghamshire Borough Council to deliver the agreed Strategic Access Management and Monitoring program; and with Slough Borough Council to deliver Section 106 agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An annual report of activity has been produced and circulated to partners.</li> <li>• Our Community Engagement Rangers are having a positive impact, and development of essential monitoring systems was established in 2023/24.</li> <li>• Developer contributions to deliver the SAMMs collected by Buckinghamshire Borough Council have been transferred to the City of London.</li> </ul>
14.	Continue to provide learning programmes for schools and for children with special educational needs which build wellbeing and nature connection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the 2023-24 the Learning Programme engaged audiences across Hampstead Heath (including Parliament Hill Fields and Golders Hill Park), Highgate Wood, Epping Forest (including Barn Hoppitt and Wanstead Flats), and West Ham Park, with a total of 40,000 participants.</li> <li>• 88% of participants reported feeling 'connected' or 'very connected' to nature after taking part.</li> <li>• A detailed update on the Learning Programme's performance during 2023-24 was presented to the Natural Environment Board in May 2024.</li> </ul>
15.	<p><b>City Gardens</b></p> <p>Deliver the Biodiversity Action Plan; deliver improvement schemes along biodiversity routes as part of the Climate Adaptation Strategy; develop a Climate-resilient planting catalogue; and deliver a street tree development programme under the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Biodiversity Action Plan progressed during 2023-24 with actions and target dates reviewed.</li> <li>• The Biodiversity Partnership Group was reformed with the aim of fostering a network of external organisations who can collaborate and support one another to deliver the Biodiversity Action Plan. The Group has since formed three subgroups made up of City of London officers and external organisations, to focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communications: identify opportunities to engage with City community to raise awareness of the BAP and support biodiversity in the Square Mile.</li> <li>○ Pollinators in the City: develop guidance on supporting pollinators in the built environment by enabling a biodiversity partnership working group.</li> <li>○ Biological Recording in City: increase understanding of biodiversity in the Square Mile through systematic surveys and species recording.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A plant species list has been produced and is being employed in new projects. The list will be reviewed and improved annually as lessons are learnt. We will also share the list with external partners and ask for their feedback.</li></ul>
16.	<b>City Gardens</b> Replace the City Gardens Team's existing diesel fleet with fully electric vehicles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The first of the new electric vehicles has been delivered and is now in use.</li><li>• There has been a delay with the build of the remaining electric vehicles, but these are expected to be delivered before summer 2024.</li></ul>