

Committee(s): Natural Environment Board	Dated: 17 October 2024
Subject: Project Prioritisation Process	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse engaged communities • Dynamic economic growth • Vibrant thriving destination • Flourishing public spaces • Providing excellent services • Leading sustainable environment
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£ N/A
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Katie Stewart, Executive Director of Environment	For Decision
Report authors: Emily Brennan, Natural Environment Director	

Summary

The purpose of the report is to propose a project prioritisation process for the Natural Environment Division which will inform the development and implementation of the five year business plan. The project prioritisation process will enable production of a prioritised project list by applying a set of agreed prioritisation criteria. A prioritisation process is needed as the Corporation's Natural Environment Division has limited resources (both monetary and staff) and does not have sufficient capacity to deliver everything on their 'wish list'.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve the proposed project prioritisation criteria and process for the Natural Environment Division Business Plan, subject to the approval by the City Corporation acting in its capacity as trustee for each of the relevant Natural Environment charities.
- Authorise the Executive Director Environment to make minor amendments to the project prioritisation matrix to take on board comments/feedback arising

from its consideration by the different Natural Environment charity management committees.

Main Report

Current Position

One of the key priorities for the Natural Environment Division is to develop and implement a more strategic and joined-up approach to business planning and project prioritisation. This is needed to ensure that the charity objectives for each of the Natural Environment charities are being delivered and that charity resources are being used effectively and efficiently. It will also enable the Corporation's strategic priorities, business planning and project management processes to be taken into account as appropriate.

It is proposed to apply the project prioritisation process to the business and project planning for each of the following Natural Environment charities: Epping Forest (charity number 232990); Ashted Common (charity number 1051510); Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common (charity number 232987); Coulsdon and Other Commons (charity number 232989); West Wickham and Spring Park Wood (charity number 232988); West Ham Park (charity number 206948); Hampstead Heath (charity number 803392); and Highgate Wood and Queens Park Kilburn (charity number 232986). The proposed approach is therefore being put separately to the City Corporation in its capacity as trustee of each of these charities for their consideration and decision in relation to its application to the business plans and proposed activities of each charity.

The Corporation currently operates on annual departmental business plans which, for the Natural Environment charities, typically combine 'business as usual' (BAU) activities with projects. Projects with a value of greater than £50,000 must follow the Corporation's Project Gateway Process (Appendix 1), however this process does not apply to BAU activities or to projects with a value of less than £50,000. There is currently no central process for prioritising projects therefore business plans are typically a combination of essential BAU plus a 'wish list' of projects, which can result in unrealistic expectations and/or inability to deliver some activities.

Some projects are essential, for example those which relate to compliance and health and safety, whilst others are not. Capacity to deliver BAU and projects is limited but there is currently no clear way of assessing and deciding which activities can be delivered within existing capacity and budget, and which activities will require additional capacity and/or budget. The Corporation is seeking to address this by including in its new five-year Departmental Business Plans an estimation of the resources required to deliver each high-level activity. The proposed project prioritisation process for the Natural Environment Division also seeks to address this by agreeing and applying a list of priority criteria to each activity, thereby enabling production of a prioritised list of activities. This prioritised list can then be assessed against available staff and monetary resources to decide which activities will be included in the business plan.

The proposed project prioritisation process for The Natural Environment Division will feed into the Corporation's comprehensive refresh of its project procedures which is due to begin in September 2024. By cutting down on bureaucracy, the Corporation aims to significantly quicken project delivery pace, whilst upholding its commitment to transparency and control. This streamlined approach will not only accelerate processes but also set a new standard for project management within the organisation.

The project prioritisation process will reflect the various governing documents for the Natural Environment charities, and charity law and guidance, as relevant. Projects will be considered in light of each charity's objects and governing documents as appropriate and relevant; for example, whether they are compatible with and in furtherance of the charity's objects. That will be relevant to the consideration in the matrix of whether the project is essential for operations. The inclusion of the charity objects category in the matrix helps to clarify which, and how many, of the objects are engaged; the analysis will be specific to each charity and its relevant objectives.

Proposed Prioritisation Criteria and Weighting

Each activity will be scored against the criteria listed below. Scores have been weighted according to the relative importance of the criteria: those shown in bold font have been allocated greater weight.

Criteria description	Scoring options
Is the project essential for operations (as opposed to desirable)?	Yes=4 / No=0
Will the project support one or more of the Corporate Plan Outcomes? (Diverse, engaged communities; Leading Sustainable Environment; Providing Excellent Services; Dynamic Economic Growth; Vibrant, Thriving Destination; Flourishing Public Spaces)	None =0, 1 outcome=1, 2 outcomes=2 etc (max=6)
Will the project support delivery of one or more of the Natural Environment Strategies: (Nature Conservation and Resilience; Community and Engagement; Access and Recreation; Culture, Heritage and Learning)	None=0, 1 strategy=1 etc (max=4)
Will the project support the Natural Environment charities' objects?	None=0, 1 object=1 etc (max=5)
Will the project generate income (over and above the cost of delivery)?	Yes=4 / No=0
Has funding been secured?	Above 75% =4 51-75% =3 26-50% =2 Up to 25% =1 No=0
Will the project's deliverables be sustainable in the longer-term?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financially sustainable 	Yes=1 / No=0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operationally sustainable 	Yes=1 / No=0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmentally sustainable 	Yes=1 / No=0

Will the project deliver service improvement?	Yes=2 Partial=1 No=0
Will the project address a risk on the Natural Environment risk register?	Red risk=4 Amber risk=2 Green or No=0
What is the level of risk associated with the project? <i>Consider failure to deliver the project's outcomes, reputational risk etc</i>	Low=2 Medium=1 High=0
Will delivery of the project result in positive publicity and/or reputational benefit?	Yes=2 Possibly=1 No=0
Can the project be delivered within existing 'business as usual' capacity?	Yes=2 / No=0
Is the project to be delivered in partnership with another organisation/group?	Yes=2 / No=0
	MAXIMUM = 44

Conclusion

A project prioritisation process is urgently needed to inform the development, approval and implementation of an effective and affordable five year business plan for the Natural Environment Division. It is recommended that the process and criteria are approved by the Natural Environment Board and are then applied to proposed project activities to enable production of a prioritised list which will feed into the business plan.

Appendices

Appendix 1: CoL Project Gateway Process

Appendix 2: Natural Environment Project Prioritisation Spreadsheet

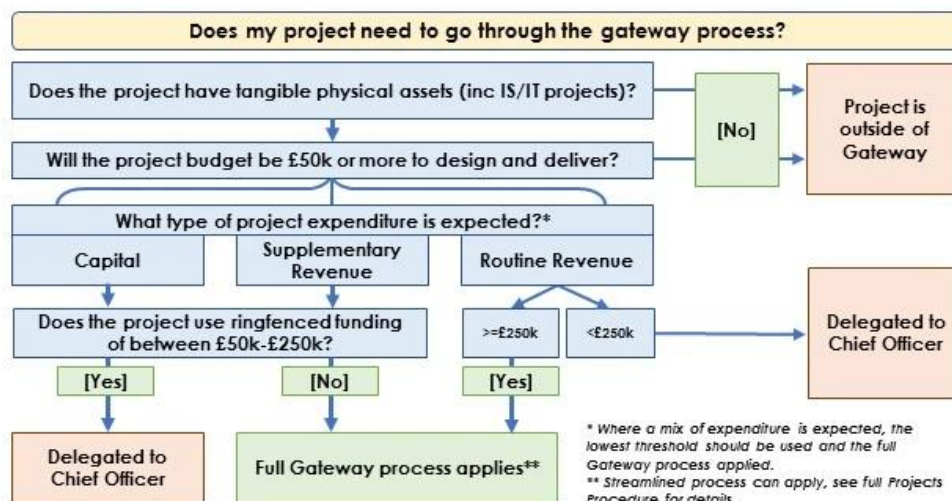
Contact

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Appendix 1: Project Gateway Process

Entering the Gateway Process

The Projects Procedure and Gateway Process applies to projects that result in tangible, physical deliverables or assets, including Information Systems / Technology projects where the assets are 'digital' in nature.



The difference between Capital, Supplementary Revenue and Routine Revenue is an accounting distinction and can be guided by Chamberlain's.

Capital: Major schemes (>£50,000) relating to the acquisition, creation or enhancement of an asset which yields benefits to the authority and the services it provides for a period of more than one year. Basic definition taken from the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting, which has the force of law. Further conditions e.g. in relation to enhancements. Excludes regular or cyclical repairs, but includes cyclical replacement of major components, e.g. new windows etc.

Supplementary Revenue: (>£50,000) Project expenditure of a substantial or major nature which was previously classified as capital but is now revenue so as to conform to current accounting regulations, such as a major repair.

Routine Revenue: Traditional revenue project expenditure which is met from local risk budgets. e.g. cyclical painting and repairs.

Ringfenced funds: Designated Sales Pools, Cyclical Works Programme, Housing Revenue Account, Section 278, Section 106, and Area Strategies. Ringfenced funds also includes activities where the external funder (i.e. TFL) is providing funding for a restricted purpose.

Gateway Routes

Risk, Complexity and Uniqueness

	Low	Medium	High
Estimated Cost (£50k<£250k)	Light	Light	Regular
Estimated Cost (£250k~£5m)	Regular	Regular	Complex
Estimated Cost (£5m+)	Regular	Complex	Complex