

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD
Thursday, 17 October 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Natural Environment Board held at Committee Room -
2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 17 October 2024 at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Caroline Haines (Chair)
Eamonn Mullally (Deputy Chairman)
Wendy Mead OBE
James St John Davis
Heather Barrett-Mold
Dani Stephenson
Catherine Bickmore (Observer)

In Attendance:

Vladislav Dobrokhotov
Tony Leach
Benjamin Murphy

Externals:

Simon Lightman (King Edward's Witley)

Officers:

Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Anna Cowperthwaite	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's
Ola Obadara	- City Surveyor's
Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Simon Glynn	- Environment Department
Joanne Hill	- Environment Department
Joe Kingston	- Environment Department
Jake Tibbetts	- Environment Department
Abigail Tinkler	- Environment Department
Heinz Traut	- Environment Department
Katie Stewart	- Executive Director of Environment
Joseph Smith	- Town Clerk's Department
Callum Southern	- Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Anne Corbett and Alderman & Sheriff Gregory Jones KC.

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

No declarations were made.

3. **MINUTES**

The Board agreed to amend the attendee list to add Catherine Bickmore who attended the last meeting and amend the apologies to ensure 'Wendy Mead MBE' was changed to 'Wendy Mead OBE'.

RESOLVED – That, the public minutes of the last meeting held on 11 July 2024 be agreed, subject to the agreed amendments, as a correct record of the meeting.

4. **YOUTH NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD UPDATE**

The Board considered a report by Simon Lightman, an external contributor from St. Edwards Witley School, that provided an update on the progress of the City of London Natural Environment Youth Board (YNEB) since its initial proposed was endorsed on 17 April 2024.

Simon Lightman noted that the YNEB was currently in the process of signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Institute of Sustainability at the University of Surrey and the City of London with the Bridewell Foundation as the coordinating partner.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) Members sought clarity on the reference to 'City Academy' under Key Data, noting there were several such institutions. Lightman confirmed it was City Academy – Southwark.
- b) The Board considered the legacy when the students involved left school. The Chair noted it was for sixth formers and older Year 11s and the City would continue working with the students as long as they're in further education.
- c) Members discussed whether it would be worth Donation Representative Governors from schools outside the 18-school group receiving a note on this to coordinate with Simon Lightman.
- d) A Member suggested that an offer of Freedom of the City of London could be made when pupils and students reached a certain age.

5. **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CHARITY DEVELOPMENT - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Board received a verbal update from the Assistant Director of Charity Development and highlighted the main themes being considered were financial models, income generation and use of assets. An analysis of similar charity organisation was being undertaken to consider how they dealt with problems of fundraising and resourcing.

6. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR CULTURE AND PROJECTS UPDATE REPORT Q1: APRIL - JUNE 2024

The Board considered a report which provided an update against workstreams, outcomes and key performance indicators from the Natural Environment Division Business Plan and objectives from the Natural Environment Strategies that are applicable to staff in the Culture and Projects Section covering April-June 2024 (Q1).

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) Officers informed the Board that work had taken place to mitigate unplanned closures of the Monument to maximise income received and ensure it stayed on a sound financial footing.
- b) It was also noted by Officers that they were enacting resolutions by NEB and the City Bridge Foundation Board to support the transfer of the Monument to a more suitable corporate home. A report would be brought to the Board in future on that.
- c) Officers also indicated they had explored opportunities for further income generation opportunities at the Monument ahead of the permanent transfer.
- d) The Board enquired into the cost of ensuring Wanstead Grotto was removed from the Heritage-at-Risk register. Officers explained that a request for the Listed Building Consent repair had been submitted and were awaiting the outcome of that. Officers confirmed the project would then be taken through the corporate gateway process and the estimated cost, subject to contractors and quotes, was £550,000.
- e) The Board considered whether the public were being made aware of when the Monument was open/closed. Officers reported that the Cultural, Heritage and Libraries were aware of mitigation measures and ensured that the webpage was being updated if there were any unplanned closures.

RECEIVED.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director of Environment regarding the Natural Environment Cross-Divisional Risk Register which included risks which are managed by the Executive Director of Environment at a higher, strategic, level.

The Executive Director of Environment proposed an amendment to the recommendation that read "Members are asked to consider and note the Natural Environment Cross-Divisional Risk Register which sets out the key top-

level risks to the charities and the systems in place to identify and mitigate risks across the charities.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) Officers indicated there was a willingness to re-prioritise the highest risks and make use of expertise of teams on the ground; efforts were underway to strengthen the relationship between City Surveyors' and Natural Environment Division.
- b) A Member considered the declining condition of assets in relation to the Pergola at Hampstead Heath. The Chair noted a paper was going to the next meeting of Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee on the issue.
- c) The Chair raised a question concerning negative aspects of public behaviour. Officers reported the outreach team was investigating issues at the tunnel in Castle Baynard ward and were involved in a joint operation with City Operations to tackle rough sleeping.
- d) Officers noted a Keeper with enforcement powers had been appointed to start on Monday 21 October. The keeper would initially deal with anti-social behaviour at Bunhill Fields before being deployed to other parts of the City.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Considered and noted the Natural Environment Cross-Divisional Risk Register which sets out the key top-level risks to the charities and the systems in place to identify and mitigate risks across the charities

8. **PROJECT PRIORITISATION PROCESS**

The Board considered a report which proposed a project prioritisation process for the Natural Environment Division which would inform the development and implementation of the five-year business plan.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) A Member of the Board suggested the prioritisation process would allow Members to see why certain projects were not being carried out and allowed the charities to make external partners aware of financial implications and the resources required to complete projects.
- b) It was discussed why more weight was not being given to the criteria around whether a project would be delivered in partnership with another organisation. Officers accepted it would need to be reviewed at a later stage and the weighting may need to change as a result of its performance.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Approved 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.
- Authorised 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.

9. VOLUNTEERING AUDIT

The Board considered a report which described volunteering across the Natural Environment Division and City Gardens, providing an overview of the scale of volunteering activities, highlighting achievements and areas needing improvement.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) It was considered whether a Member could be involved as a volunteering lead to raise its profile and noted the importance of the value offered from volunteering being put on a business-footing.
- b) Members expressed the need for volunteering to be aligned with strategic ambitions of the organisations and charities.
- c) It was discussed how youth volunteering could be built into the long-term objectives of the Corporation and the charities with the City family of schools. Officers noted that policy and guidance was in place across the sites for youth volunteering and there was a need for more DBS-checked staff.
- d) The Board contemplated the training volunteers received. Officers explained that volunteering was a two-way process and training happened on site dependent of needs of volunteers.
- e) A Member felt Appendix 1 slightly underplayed the role of volunteers at West Ham Park, particularly with consideration of their role with the 150th anniversary celebrations.
- f) Members considered whether the time value of volunteering could be converted into capital value to assist with grant applications. The Chair confirmed that had already been occurring with the individual charities.
- g) It was emphasised that huge social cohesive value could be brought out when communities are involved and stressed that volunteer opportunities could be a means for change of career or steps to employment.

- h) A Member discussed whether Civic Affairs Sub-Committee should consider an event to showcase volunteer value as there was huge scope for involvement from businesses with CSR funding in the Square Mile and would tie into wider City Corporation objectives.

RECEIVED.

10. **BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Board considered a report which provided an update on the progress of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) following its launch in 2021. The report noted that at this stage, the BAP sat at an average completion rate of 47% across 21 actions which put it on track for the 2026 planned completion date.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) A Member welcomed the Cross-London Nature Recovery Initiative and queried how it would fit into the Climate and Nature Bill in Parliament as it may be helpful to direct that Bill.
- b) The Chair suggested it may be helpful to have an item on the agenda in future on how bills proceeding through the parliamentary process can be influenced.
- c) The Committee discussed the need for a huge amount of attention on nature recovery and highlighted the amount of communication to BIDs on greening.
- d) It was reiterated by Committee members of the need to continually emphasise the interrelationship of biodiversity and climate change.

RECEIVED.

11. **OPERATIONAL FINANCE PROGRESS REPORT - QUARTER 2 (AUGUST 2024) 2024/25**

The Board received a report which provided an update on the operational finance position for Quarter 2 for 2024/25 for the Natural Environment Division's revenue budget to date to the end of August 2024 and projected year-end outturn position, current live capital projects and outstanding debt position.

Officers noted that the report had been updated to ensure it was more in line with charity financial reporting rather than local authority reporting.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) The Chair considered why there was an overspend forecasted and if mitigations were in place to manage it. Officers explained it was not the local risk budget and was related to the City Surveyors' budget and the upkeep of buildings, monuments and memorials at Bunhill Field.

- b) Officers indicated there was a need to ensure that local teams and the City Surveyors were looking at the same asset registers.
- c) It was discussed that 70% of Total Debt Outstanding was over 60 days old and a Member emphasised the need for that to be addressed.

RECEIVED.

12. **CITY GARDENS UPDATE**

Officers reported to the Board that World Urban Parks had awarded London a special legacy award for its achievements on green spaces, including the establishment of London as the world's first national park city. Specific organisations such as the City of London and Royal Parks were highlighted by the organisation and Officers accepted the award on behalf of the whole of London.

The Board received a report which provided an update to Members on current management and operational activities across the City Gardens section.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- a) Officers indicated that an official opening for Finsbury Circus would likely occur on the first week of June.
- b) In response to questions about Jubilee Gardens, Officers suggested the likely official opening day would be early in July once details had been confirmed with the Worshipful Company of Gardeners. Work on the Garden was scheduled to be completed in December.
- c) A Member indicated the garden launch for Big Curry Lunch would take place on 28 January 2025 and explained it was set up to raise money for military veterans, having raised around £3.7m since its inception with more than £400,000 raised this year.
- d) The Chair informed the Committee that the Christmas tree lighting was due to take place 3 December 2024.

RECEIVED.

13. **UPCOMING DATES OF INTEREST TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD**

The Board received a list of upcoming dates of interest to the Natural Environment Board.

14. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

No questions were raised on matters relating to the work of the Committee.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

No other business was raised that the Chair considered urgent.

16. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

17. FINSBURY CIRCUS GARDENS REINSTATEMENT

The Board received a report of the Executive Director of Environment.

18. CARBON REMOVALS (CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY) PROJECT 2024/25 UPDATE

The Board received a report of the Executive Director of Environment.

19. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

A presentation was received by the Board from the Natural Environment Director.

20. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND WHICH THE COMMITTEE AGREE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHILST THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED

One Item of urgent business was raised by the Chair for discussion.

The meeting ended at 1.11 pm

Chairman

**Contact Officer: Callum Southern
Callum.Southern@cityoflondon.gov.uk**