

Progress against key workstreams 2024-25
1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024

Ref:	Workstream	Progress April-September 2024-25
1.	<p>City Gardens Maintain City-owned green spaces in the Square Mile. Complete Finsbury Circus re-landscaping (Nov2023-Dec 2024). Effectively manage our spaces to ensure they are safe and pleasant and fit to provide the essential long-term benefits of green areas, including increasing biodiversity and adapting to become more climate resilient.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is on course to open Finsbury Circus to the public early in February 2025, with an official Mayoral launch programme planned for June 2025. • An updated City Gardens Events Policy is presented to this meeting of the Natural Environment Board for approval. • A new 'Keeper' role at Bunhill Fields has been filled. The postholder is authorised to enforce byelaws and legislation with a focus on promoting responsible dog ownership. • The Biodiversity Action Plan is on track to deliver its actions by 2026. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work is underway on a range of climate resilient biodiversity schemes which will be delivered in the second half of the year. These include the refurbishment of Jubilee Gardens; a new garden at Finsbury Circus western arm; several new Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS); and the planting of 18 new highway trees. ○ The City Nature Challenge took place in April, endorsed by the Lord Mayor. Staff joined the Climate Champions in three City gardens to record biodiversity.
2.	<p>Nature conservation and resilience Protect and enhance the biodiversity of our open spaces. Increase the resilience of our open spaces within a wider, interconnected natural landscape. Establish a natural capital-based management process across our open spaces.</p>	<p>A wide range of actions were undertaken across the open spaces during the first half of the year to progress this workstream.</p> <p>Epping Forest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Countryside Stewardship Grant (of £2,351,965) was awarded which will support work to conserve veteran trees, acid grassland and other protected landscapes across 10 years. • Officers contributed to the consultation document for the proposed National Planning Policy Framework reform. • Natural England commenced the re-survey for the SSSI condition assessments. • Delivery of the Climate Action Strategy included the commencement of an arable reversion project at Copped Hall where eight fields were re-seeded with a grass and wildflower mix.

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		<p>North London Open Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tree Team continued their tree safety work across NLOS following high winds in August. • Tree safety work at West Ham Park was a key focus in the preparations for the site's 150th Event in July. • The continuing irrigation of the trees planted over the last three years across Hampstead Heath has ensured that the trees are now establishing well and are developing resilient root systems. <p>The Commons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of the impact of recreation pressure on the SAC at Burnham Beeches has commenced as part of the Burnham Beeches SAMMs agreement. • Natural England's response to the first consultation on the proposed extensions to the Surrey Hills National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) was published in July 2024. A second phase of consultation will be held which will focus on the changes made since the first consultation. • Species records and other biological data are regularly gathered and professionally managed. • Landscape connectivity around the Commons was enhanced through collaboration with other organisations and stakeholders.
3.	<p>Community engagement</p> <p>Partnership: create meaningful and lasting partnerships.</p> <p>Ownership: cultivate a sense of deep pride in, and attachment to, our spaces amongst users.</p> <p>Knowledge exchange: ensure continuous transfer of information between the Corporation and its customers.</p>	<p>Volunteers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the environmental importance of Epping Forest has been raised with groups of young people participating in volunteering events, and new volunteers have been recruited. • Heath Hands, our valued partners on the Heath and in Highgate Wood – celebrated their 25th anniversary on 6 June at a well-attended event on the grounds of Kenwood House. • The North London Open Spaces charities continued to benefit from the extraordinary efforts of local volunteers: West Ham Park hosted 118 during April and March alone. • Volunteers from the local community were encouraged to participate in activities at the Commons sites, providing many thousands of hours of support.

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		<p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement Rangers, funded by s106 and SAMMs agreements, developed new partnerships with Slough Borough Council and Burnham Parish to mitigate impacts of increased visitor numbers from development on the Burnham Beeches SAC. • Burnham Beeches officers hosted a visit by Natural England National staff responsible for giving guidance on trees, wood pasture and woodland. • Over 120 people attended the 'Big Wild Walk' event on Kenley Common in May. This 4km trail had multiple stations led by Rangers and volunteers with activities to highlight important species/habitats and showcase management actions e.g. conservation grazing, coppicing/charcoal production.
4.	<p>Access and recreation</p> <p>Excellence: Enable the best possible visitor journey, creating the right information from pre-visit to on-site experience in exemplar sites.</p> <p>Equal access: Provide welcoming places that visitors from all backgrounds and abilities are comfortable to explore.</p> <p>Inform: Build understanding and knowledge about our open spaces.</p> <p>Visitors will respect one another and will care for and advocate for the sites.</p>	<p>The open spaces won a total of six gold awards in this year's 'London in Bloom' competition. In addition, 14 Green Flag Awards were won, with 12 of those sites receiving Green Heritage status. Queen's Park and Highgate Wood are two of only four parks across the country that have won a Green Flag every year since the launch of the Awards 28 years ago.</p> <p>Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements were made to a section of the easy access path at Burnham Beeches and provision of free loan of a mobility scooter continued. • Walks delivered in partnership have welcomed new audiences to Epping Forest such as 'Black Girls Hike' and 'Muslim Hikers' with Epping Forest Heritage Trust leading the walks. • The Ponds Access Project was completed at Hampstead Heath's Ladies, Mixed and Men's ponds: this includes hoists, sliding doors and fencing to assist with control of the new accessible platform. <p>Visitor experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to install or replace signage has progressed across the open spaces sites to improve visitor experience, and better protect specific features and areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At Epping Forest, new signs were installed for the protection of iron age hillforts. Visitors are now more aware of the location and importance of the Iron Age Hillfort at Loughton Camp and Forest Keepers are better able to enforce against misuse. ○ The Countryside Stewardship Scheme grant will pay for new signage to welcome and inform visitors across less accessed parts of Epping Forest.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New signage is being developed for the Golders Hill Park Zoo. ○ Replacement of signs, with ones made from sustainable materials, is being scoped at Ashtead, West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons. ● A consultant has been engaged to prepare a Sustainable Visitor Strategy for Burnham Beeches. ● A £50,000 grant from the Rural Recovery Fund was awarded for the Epping Forest sculpture trail. ● Sports and leisure facilities across the North London Open Spaces saw high visitor numbers, particularly over the spring and summer months. The successful, large public event, 'Night of the 10k PBs', was held in May at the recently refurbished Athletics Track.
5.	<p>Culture, Heritage and Learning Develop communities of interest that participate in, advocate for, and support our Natural Environment and Heritage charities. Develop a learning offer that builds nature connection and wellbeing. Protect and enhance our built heritage landscape heritage and archaeological assets and promote them as part of our visitor and learning offers.</p>	<p>Culture and heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Following successful restoration, the original Highgate Roman kiln was displayed at Highgate Wood. A replica kiln was displayed and fired at Highgate Wood Heritage Open Day on 1 September. ● A recommended repair option essential to remove Wanstead Grotto from the Heritage at Risk Register was approved by Epping Forest and Commons Committee in July. ● A new exhibition was launched at Keats House in May. ● The Culture and Projects team received grant funding from the City of London Cultural and Creative Learning Fund for four engagement projects. <p>Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learning Programmes promoting nature connection and wellbeing for schools, young people and families were delivered over a busy Summer period. ● In September, a 'Green change-makers project' commenced, in partnership with the Learning Team, Heritage and Museums Team and Heath Hands to deliver two climate resilient gardens. ● An article authored by officers in the Learning Team featured in the publication 'Implementing Climate Change Education in Schools; Constructive Hope in Action; Climate Adapted Pathways for Education and Leeds Trinity University 2024'.

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6.	<p>Income generation Develop and start to implement an income generation plan for the Natural Environment Division. Complete the Operational Property Review. Conserve and improve built assets across the Natural Environment Division and City Gardens, tackling the 'bow wave' of maintenance backlog works.</p>	<p>Financial sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Fundraising Strategy is in development, in collaboration with colleagues across the Corporation, to identify funding sources. The Strategy will include clear targets, define priority income streams and help to develop a coordinated approach. Actions from the Strategy will be built into the new five-year charity business plans. • Officers continue to support delivery of the Natural Environment Charity Review. The Charity Review will also aim to develop a sustainable funding model for the charities and enable funds to be restricted for specific use within the Natural Environment Division. <p>Built assets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical maintenance backlog funding for the City Surveyor's Department's (CSD) Cyclical Works Programme (CWP) was approved in early 2024 to address maintenance items that had remained unfunded and incomplete in recent years. • Work is underway with CSD to ensure agreed new funding, where those specific items are no longer required, is directed towards other necessary works within the charity.