

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee	Dated: 4 February 2025
Subject: Five-year Business Plan (Highgate Wood)	Public report: For Information
This proposal: • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes • provides statutory duties • provides business enabling functions	
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Spending is as per approved annual and supplemental budgets
If so, how much?	Spending is as per approved annual and supplemental budgets
What is the source of Funding?	<u>Multiple</u> -Local Risk -City Surveyor's Department -Capital Funding -Climate Action Strategy -External Funding -Charity income
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Yes
Report of:	Katie Stewart, Executive Director Environment
Report author:	Bill LoSasso, Assistant Director (Superintendent), North London Open Spaces

Summary

This report provides a working draft of the first five-year business plan for Highgate Wood, which is still under development. It also summarises the various documents and plans that guide the work of North London Open Spaces in managing the four spaces that it is responsible for, including Highgate Wood.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Review the draft Highgate Wood Five-year Business Plan provided at Appendix 1 and provide any comments at the committee meeting on 4 February 2025.

Main Report

Background

1. North London Open Spaces (NLOS) is responsible for the day-to-day management of four public open spaces: 1) Hampstead Heath, 2) Highgate Wood, 3) Queen's Park, and 4) West Ham Park).
2. The management of these four open spaces is administered through three separate charities: 1) Hampstead Heath (Charity no. 803392), 2) Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Kilburn (Charity no. 232986), and 3) West Ham Park (Charity no. 206948).
3. NLOS is overseen by two management committees of the City of London Corporation: 1) Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee, which governs the three named spaces, and 2) West Ham Park Committee, which governs West Ham Park.
4. A significant amount of strategy development has occurred at the City Corporation over the past 18 months, including development of a new Corporate Plan, development of four new Natural Environment Division Strategies, and the update of the Highgate Wood Management Plan. In addition, the City Corporation's open space charities are now developing rolling five-year business plans to further guide their work planning and delivery.
5. Business planning for NLOS is complex and has become more complex in recent years due to multiple factors, including NLOS's complex multi-site structure and reporting relationships, recent staff reductions, having a large number of staff who split their time across more than one site, and the practice of workstreams being conceived, funded, and delivered variously by NLOS and other City Corporation departments and initiatives that nevertheless require NLOS resource to deliver (eg, City Surveyor's Department programmes and the Climate Action Strategy).

6. The development of a five-year business plans will support central planning, delivery, and reporting on these numerous workstreams across four sites for our one NLOS sub-division, as well as better time management for Officers.

Management of Highgate Wood

7. The Highgate Wood Management Plan (2025 - 2035) provides the strategic direction for the management of Highgate Wood, setting out five strategic themes for the site. The Plan was approved by the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee on 3 December 2024.
8. The City Corporation is now developing five-year business plans at its open space charities on a rolling five-year basis. The five-year Business Plan will state the charities' planned workstreams and outputs for Highgate Wood over a five-year period and will show how and when the various workstreams will be resourced, delivered, and measured.
9. The five-year Business Plan will be updated annually to reflect changes in priorities and resources and to rescope workstreams to reflect new risks, constraints, and changes if and when needed. This review will typically occur annually, but may occur by exception at other times to capitalise on new opportunities or respond to arising circumstances.
10. The draft five-year Business Plan for Highgate Wood (Appendix 1) lists proposed prioritised workstreams to deliver on the charitable obligations and five strategic themes of the Highgate Wood Management Plan. It also illustrates how these workstreams further relevant goals of the Corporate Plan and Natural Environment Strategies. The plan sets out the specific priorities and activities for Highgate Wood, and progress against them will be reported.
11. The Highgate Wood five-year Business Plan is an important planning and communication tool. It allows the charity to articulate its priorities for Highgate Wood in a resource-constrained environment, and to plan with as much predictability as is feasible what workstreams it believes are reasonably achievable given these resource constraints. Workstreams tentatively planned for out years beyond the current year will necessarily be tentative and will be refined as clarity on out year resources and circumstances becomes clearer.
12. In principle, once the workstreams for a given year are established, any new area of proposed work will require consideration to how new resources can be secured or to which existing workstream(s) will need to be paused, ceased, or deferred in order to include anything new in the plan.

13. The five-year Business Plan is not an exhaustive itemised list of NLOS's workstreams. Including an itemised list of the day-to-day "business as usual" activities that take up the majority of Officers' time would be impractical. This "business as usual" work is guided by an Annual Work Plan that guides the day-to-day activities of officers and sets out cyclical tasks that are planned and delivered on an annual or seasonal basis. This includes activities such as litter picking, cleansing, grass mowing, patrols, and the voluminous other critical tasks that are performed regularly as part of the day-to-day running of Highgate Wood.
14. The draft five-year Business Plan is still under development, and currently focusses on 2025-26 and 2026-27. The plan will be further developed over time as greater clarity on future years' resources becomes available, Officers complete the project prioritisation process (the subject of a separate report to this committee), and Officers develop estimates on the resourcing needed to deliver sought workstreams.
15. Estimating the resourcing devoted to workstreams, both at Highgate Wood and across all four of NLOS's open spaces, is complex and will evolve and be refined over time. To illustrate the complexity, these estimates must reflect that fact that while many Officers work exclusively at Highgate Wood (eg, Rangers working exclusively at Highgate Wood), other Officers at NLOS work across multiple or all of the open spaces within NLOS's purview.
16. Officers plan to return to this Committee on 20 May 2025 with a more developed plan, and ask Members to provide any representations now for consideration as work on this complex undertaking continues. While plans must be written for each individual site, a cohesive single plan is ultimately needed to allow for work to be effectively planned, coordinated, and delivered by one NLOS sub-division across its four separate spaces and three separate charities.

Project Prioritisation Process

17. Some workstreams and projects are essential to the running of Highgate Wood, including those that relate to compliance and health and safety; others are not. There is currently no clear way of assessing and deciding which activities can be delivered within the existing resource envelope (including budget, Officer capacity, and availability of equipment, materials, and supplies), and what activities will either require additional resource to proceed or will need to be paused, ceased or deferred to later years due to being beyond the resource envelope available.

18. Officers seek to address this by including an estimation of the resources required to deliver the various workstreams in the new five-year Business Plan. This exercise is still a work in progress and will evolve and be refined in the coming months and years.
19. Given the reality of officers not having sufficient resources to deliver everything on everyone's "wish list", a prioritisation process is needed to help prioritise those workstreams that are critical to the management of Highgate Wood, the achievement of its charitable goals, and which further improve Highgate Wood and what it offers.
20. Accordingly, a Project Prioritisation Process has been created by officers, which is the subject of a separate report to this committee. This process will enable production of a prioritised list of projects and workstreams for Highgate Wood, and for NLOS more broadly, by applying a set of agreed prioritisation criteria to projects and workstreams being considered for inclusion in the Five-year Business Plan. The output of that process, which can then be assessed against available resources to decide which activities will be included in the business plan, will also inform any subsequent updates or proposals for new work for inclusion in the five-year Business Plan.

Other documents informing management of Highgate Wood

21. In addition to the Highgate Wood Management Plan and five-year Business Plan, there are numerous other strategies, plans, programmes, projects, and initiatives at the City Corporation that inform and provide guidance to North London Open Spaces' management of Highgate Wood, and with which the Highgate Wood Management Plan is aligned. These include:
 - a. City of London Corporation Corporate Plan (2024-2029), which guides planning and decision-making for the City Corporation through six strategic outcomes.
 - b. Natural Environment Strategies (2024-29), which sets out the City Corporation's strategic approach to its managed open spaces, assets and activities and aligns the Corporate Plan strategic objectives with site-specific management plans (eg, Highgate Wood Management Plan).
 - c. Environment Department's High-Level Business Plan (2025-26), a department annual plan which provides a strategic overview of the key areas of work that will be undertaken across the whole Environment Department during 2024-25.
 - d. Climate Action Strategy (2020-2027), which sets out climate action commitments across all the City Corporation's assets, including its

open spaces.

External support and deliverables

22. Also included within the five-year Business Plan are works being delivered and funded via the following programmes, whose budgets exist outside of and independent from Highgate Wood's local risk budget. These include:
- a. Cyclical Work Plan: repairs and maintenance projects that are required on a cyclical / life cycle basis is provided by the City Surveyor's Department.
 - b. Building Repairs and Reactive Maintenance Programme: building repairs and maintenance delivered via a planned preventative maintenance programme, that also includes reactive repairs and is provided by the City Surveyor's Department.
 - c. Climate Action Strategy: a programme to implement various carbon reduction and resilience projects at open spaces, including Highgate Wood

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications

23. The Highgate Wood five-year Business Plan will further the Highgate Wood Management Plan strategic themes, the Corporate Plan's strategic outcomes, and the four Natural Environment Strategies, as further detailed in this report.

Financial implications

24. Activities in the five-year Business Plan will be planned to meet the existing local risk of Highgate Wood.

Resource implications

25. Officers managing Highgate Wood are operating in a resource-constrained environment. As noted in this report, the five-year Business Plan will support better alignment of workstreams within available resourcing to better articulate what is and is not possible to be delivered by Officers in any given year.

Legal implications

26. The City Corporation as the charity Trustee is responsible for ensuring that the Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Kilburn Charity fulfils its charitable purpose, which is the "The preservation in perpetuity by the Corporation of London, of the open spaces known as Highgate Wood, Highgate and Queens Park, Kilburn as public parks or open spaces, for the perpetual use thereof by the public for exercise and recreation." The five-year Business Plan will assist the delivery of the Highgate Wood Management Plan and provide a clear framework for decision-making,

including resource allocation which is in the best interests of the charity, The Plan will support Members of this Committee to exercise their duties responsibly on behalf of the City Corporation.

Risk implications

27. Activities within the business plan are assessed within the Highgate Wood Risk Register.

Equalities implications

28. The Highgate Wood Management Plan strategic themes are committed to increased engagement, diversity, and accessibility, which the five-year Business Plan will support delivery of.
29. Activities within the business plan have or will have equalities impact assessments where relevant and appropriate.

Climate implications

30. Several of the activities with the five-year Business Plan are specifically to address climate-related issues.

Security implications

31. Relevant security risks are assessed with the Highgate Wood Risk Register.

Conclusion

32. A draft five-year Business Plan is being developed to prioritise workstreams at Highgate Wood. This Plan will be further developed by Officers. The plan lists proposed prioritised workstreams to deliver on the five strategic themes of the Highgate Wood Management Plan and illustrates how these workstreams further relevant goals of the Corporate Plan and Natural Environment Strategies. The plan allows the Charity to articulate its priorities for Highgate Wood in a resource-constrained environment and agree with confidence the activities that will occur in Highgate Wood in any given year with as much predictability and forward planning as is feasible. In principle, if any new areas of potential work are identified throughout the lifespan of the five-year Business Plan that are not already included in the plan, consideration will need to be given to how new resources can be secured or to which existing workstream(s) will need to be paused, ceased or postponed to accommodate any new work.

Appendices

- Appendix1: Draft five-year Business Plan for Highgate Wood.

Background Papers

- None

Bill LoSasso

Assistant Director (Superintendent)

North London Open Spaces

Environment Department (Natural Environment Division)

bill.losasso@cityoflondon.gov.uk