

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD**  
**Thursday, 6 February 2025**

Minutes of the meeting of the Natural Environment Board held at Committee Rooms  
- 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 6 February 2025 at 11.00 am

**Present**

**Members:**

**Present:**

Caroline Haines (Chair)  
Eamonn Mullally (Deputy Chairman)  
Andrew McMurtrie  
Wendy Mead OBE  
James St John Davis  
Heather Barrett-Mold  
Tony Leach

**In attendance:**

Benjamin Murphy  
Alderman & Sheriff Gregory Jones KC (Ex-Officio Member)  
Catherine Bickmore (Observer)  
Verderer Paul Morris (Observer)

**Externals:**

Sam Brook, Nuffield Scholar

**Officers:**

Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Jack Joslin	- City Bridge Foundation
Anna Cowperthwaite	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Katie Stewart	- Executive Director, Environment
Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Ben Bishop	- Environment Department
Joanne Hill	- Environment Department
Jo Hurst	- Environment Department
Andrew Impey	- Environment Department
Joe Kingston	- Environment Department
Geoff Sinclair	- Environment Department
Jake Tibbetts	- Environment Department
Maria Traynor	- Environment Department
Ben Dunleavy	- Town Clerk's Department
Zoe Williams	- Town Clerk's Department

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Deputy Alpa Raja, Vladislav Dobrokhoto, and William Upton KC.

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

There were no declarations.

3. **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That, the public minutes and non-public summary of the previous meeting held on 10 December 2024 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

*Items 16 to 20 were considered before item 4.*

4. **NUFFIELD SCHOLAR PRESENTATION**

The Committee received a presentation from Sam Brooks, a Nuffield Scholar.

The Chair asked whether the scholar was considering the issue of sustainable substrate being more expensive as part of his research. The Committee heard that it is twice as expensive to fill a pot with peat-free substrate and the crops grow slower. The scholar noted that it will be important to find the balance between sustaining the business and moving to greener growing methods.

5. **YOUTH NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Chair provided an update on the Youth Natural Environment Board.

6. **CARBON ACTION STRATEGY PRESENTATION**

The Committee received a presentation from Officers from the Innovation and Growth Department about the Climate Action Strategy.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) A Member queried how 100 tonnes of carbon had been captured through the Climate Action Strategy. The Committee heard that the framework had been created through planting more greenspaces that will eventually absorb the carbon. The Officer noted that the absorption will take time, which is why the captured carbon is not measured in the sequestration target.
- b) Another Member noted that in previous discussions it was suggested that if the City Corporation could not meet its carbon targets, it could purchase more lands to be used as green spaces. The Member queried whether any progress had been made in this space. The Officer responded that this is not currently part of the plan. However, if there were other City Corporation reasons to purchase land, this may have a consequential benefit on the Climate Action Strategy.
- c) The Chair noted that Open Spaces are an effective part of the Climate Action Strategy as they are currently achieving green in all of their targets.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members received the report and noted its contents.

*Item 13 was considered before item 7.*

*The Chair left the meeting.*

*Eammon Mullally (Deputy Chair) took the Chair at 12.23pm.*

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Environment which provided an update on risk management procedures in place within the Natural Environment Board.

During the discussion, a Member noted that risk appetite appears to be changing due to factors such as change in government. The Member asked Officers for this to be reflected in the overall risk register.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members received the report and noted its contents.

**8. FIRST CONSIDERATION: ENHANCED BIODIVERSITY DUTIES OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Environment which set out what the City Corporation can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) A Member was interested in what sorts of actions had been taken to increase biodiversity. The Committee heard the gardens and cleansing team had been delivering the four key areas of the Biodiversity Action Plan, and the Planning and Development division have been working to get their biodiversity policies into the City Plan 2040. The specific biodiversity actions in garden were elaborated on in the City Gardens Update.
- b) In response to a query about working with Local Nature Recovery Strategies, the Officer noted that the strategies have provided a forum to collaborate across departments.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members received the report and noted its contents.

**9. ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT HIGH-LEVEL BUSINESS PLAN 2025-30**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Environment which set out the high-level Business Plan for the Environment Department for 2025 to 2030.

A Member requested that the 'Outcomes/Impacts' column in Section C be amended to solely reflect impacts, and the outcomes be moved to the prior columns to avoid confusion. The Officer agreed that they will take on this suggestion.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members:

- Noted the factors taken into consideration in compiling the Environment Department's high-level Business Plan 2025-30

- Approved, subject to the incorporation of the above change sought by the Committee, Section C of the Environment Department's high-level Business Plan 2025-30 (as set out in Appendix A), which covers the service areas for which the Natural Environment Board is responsible.

#### **10. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2025/26**

The Committee considered a report of the Chamberlain and the Executive Director of Environment which set out the revenue and capital budgets for the Natural Environment Board for 2025/26.

During the discussion, a Member noted that the central recharges cost has gone up significantly and in turn, is taking up a significant portion of the Open Spaces budget. The Member noted that there is currently a review taking place that is examining these recharges.

**RESOLVED –** That, Members:

- Noted the latest revenue budget for the Natural Environment Board for 2024/25
- Approved the proposed revenue budget for 2025/26 for the Natural Environment Board for submission to the Finance Committee.
- Approved the City Garden's capital and supplementary revenue budgets for 2025/26 for submission to the Finance Committee.
- Agreed that amendments to 2024/25 and 2025/26 budgets arising from changes to recharges or any further implications arising from corporate contracts, energy price increases, changes to the Cyclical Works Programme, and capital charges during budget setting be delegated to the Chamberlain in consultation with the Executive Director of Environment.
- Noted the provisional 2025/26 revenue budget estimates for the services overseen by the other Natural Environment Committees as set out in Appendix 3.

#### **11. OPERATIONAL FINANCE PROGRESS REPORT - QUARTER 3 (DECEMBER 2024) 2024/25 - NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DIVISION**

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain which provided a quarterly update on the operational finance position for the Natural Environment Division's revenue budget.

**RESOLVED –** That, Members received the report and noted its contents.

#### **12. CITY GARDENS UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Environment which provided an update on City Gardens projects.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) In response to a query about the status of the garden near the Member's carpark, the Committee was informed that scaffolding had to be erected

in the garden for emergency works on the cladding of the neighbouring building.

- b) A Member requested that the Officer share the presentation with the Committee.
- c) A Member was interested in the lessons that City Gardens had learnt from the projects it had delivered this year. The Officer responded that various failed plants had taught the team about the best planting mediums for various environments and lead them to develop a catalogue on climate resilient planting.
- d) The Member also asked whether there was an action plan in place to replace the felled trees in Houndsditch. The Officer responded that there will be 43 trees planted this year. The failure of the previous trees in Houndsditch was likely to be a result of poor drainage in the area. The Officer noted that they will planting trees that are more resilient to the area's conditions in the near future.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members received the report and noted its contents.

### 13. **TOWER HILL PLAY PROJECT**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Environment which presented a new design for the play area in Tower Hill.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- a) In response to a query, the Committee heard that the funding for the budget envelope of £250,000 had been allocated through the City Fund budgets and Section 106 agreements.
- b) When asked about the location of the play area, the Committee heard that the boundary of the City of London and Tower Hamlets runs through the middle of the play area.
- c) A Member asked whether the whole life costs for renewing the playground had been considered in the budget for future years. The Officer noted that this had not as there should be less ongoing management than the current play area. The Member encouraged the Officer to consider the play area renewal costs in the budget.
- d) A Member noted that this project was closely related to the Destination City programme, and route-marking and signage would be important to support that link.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members:

- Approved the design for a new play area at Tower Hill Gardens
- Authorised preparation and submission of planning applications to Tower Hamlets to secure planning permission for the works, along with authority for officers to negotiate and enter any related planning agreements before a gateway 5 report can be developed to draw down the remaining budget and proceed to the build stage.

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

There were no questions.

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

There were no urgent items.

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. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That, the non-public minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 December 2024 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

18. **TRANSFORMATION FOR THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITIES - OUTCOMES OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITIES REVIEW**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Environment, the Interim Managing Director of City Bridge Foundation, and the Chamberlain.

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

There were no questions.

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

There were three non-public items of urgent business.

**The meeting ended at 12.59 pm**

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Chairman

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