

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD

Thursday, 1 May 2025

Minutes of the meeting of the Natural Environment Board held at Committee Rooms
- 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 1 May 2025 at 9.30 am

Present

Members:

James St John Davis (Chair)
Charles Edward Lord, OBE JP (Deputy Chair)
Deputy Caroline Haines
Wendy Mead OBE
William Upton KC
Wendy Mead OBE
William Upton KC
Heather Barrett-Mold

In attendance:

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

Officers:

Jack Joslin	- City Bridge Foundation
Joseph Smith	- Corporate Strategy and Performance
Katie Stewart	- Executive Director, Environment
Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Ian Hughes	- Environment Department
Andrew Impey	- Environment Department
Joe Kingston	- Environment Department
Jake Tibbetts	- Environment Department
Heinz Traut	- Environment Department
Kate Neale	- Innovation & Growth
Ben Dunleavy	- Town Clerks Department
Callum Southern	- Town Clerks Department
Zoe Williams	- Town Clerks Department

Also in attendance:

Jacob Sprake, Youth Natural Environment Board
Simon Lightman, Youth Natural Environment Board

1. **APOLOGIES**

At the outset of the meeting, Wendy Mead OBE, as senior Member present, was moved into the Chair.

Apologies were received from Vladislav Dobrokhoto.

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

There were no declarations.

3. **ORDER OF THE COURT OF COMMON COUNCIL**

RESOLVED – That, Members received the Order of the Court appointing the Committee.

4. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

The Committee proceeded to elect a Chair in accordance with Standing Order No. 28. James St John Davis, as the only Member expressing their willingness to serve, was duly elected as Chairman for the ensuing year and took the Chair.

RESOLVED – That, James St John Davis be elected Chair of the Natural Environment Board for the ensuing year.

The Chair thanked the Committee and made opening remarks about their upcoming tenure as Chair. The Chair also thanked the outgoing Chair and the Members that were no longer on the Committee.

5. **ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRMAN**

The Committee proceeded to elect a Deputy Chair in accordance with Standing Order No. 29. Charles Edward Lord OBE JP, as the only Member expressing their willingness to serve, was duly elected as Deputy Chair for the ensuing year.

RESOLVED – That, Charles Edward Lord OBE JP be elected Deputy Chair of the Natural Environment Board for the ensuing year.

The Deputy Chair thanked the Committee and made opening about their upcoming tenure as Deputy Chair.

Wendy Mead OBE moved a vote of thanks to Deputy Caroline Haines, the outgoing Chair.

RESOLVED – That, Members of the Natural Environment Board wish to extend our deepest gratitude to

CAROLINE HAINES

for her remarkable leadership and dedication during her tenure as Chair of the Natural Environment Board.

Caroline has been a driving force behind the establishment of the Natural Environment Board and the appointment of four influential external advisors. Her efforts in organising two high-profile dinners and creating a collective vision for the Natural Environment Division have been pivotal. Under her guidance, four comprehensive Natural Environment Strategies were developed, showcasing her commitment to positive change.

In 2023, Caroline championed the creation of the new Natural Environment Division, transforming it from the previous Open Spaces Department. This strategic move aimed to address major environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity, and conservation more effectively.

Throughout her term, Caroline provided essential leadership and stability, drawing on her extensive experience and deep knowledge of the Corporation. She played a key role in the consultation of the Natural Environment Charities Review and the Natural Capital Audit of the Corporation's greenspaces. Her influence was instrumental in appointing new senior-level staff, including the Executive Director, Environment and the Natural Environment Director.

Caroline has been a staunch advocate for the City Gardens Team, promoting their work and ensuring the sustainability and accessibility of the Corporation's 200 gardens, churchyards, and plazas. Her efforts were crucial in the successful completion of projects like the redesigned Finsbury Circus and the transformation of Jubilee Gardens.

As a lifelong educator, Caroline passionately supported the Natural Environment Learning Team, which hosts 38,000 education courses annually. She also initiated the Youth Natural Environment Board, empowering young voices in sustainability discussions.

Caroline's visionary leadership and unwavering dedication have left an indelible mark on the Natural Environment Board. We are immensely grateful for her contributions and wish her continued success in her future endeavours.

Thank you Caroline, for your exceptional service!

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That, the public minutes and non-public summary of the previous meeting held on 6 February 2025 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

7. APPOINTMENT OF A REPRESENTATIVE TO THE STREETS AND WALKWAYS SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the appointment of a representative of the Natural Environment Board to attend the Streets and Walkways Sub Committee. Charles Edward Lord OBE JP, as the only Member expressing a willingness to serve, was duly appointed to the Streets and Walkways Sub Committee as a Natural Environment Board representative.

RESOLVED – That, Members appoint Charles Edward Lord OBE JP to the Streets and Walkways Sub Committee.

8. YOUTH NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee received a progress update from Simon Lightman and Jacob Sprake on the Youth Natural Environment Board.

The Chair noted comments made at the Commonwealth gathering at Mansion House in 2024 which followed the theme of Youth Leadership. The Chair expressed enthusiasm for the continuity of youth advocacy within the Committee's work.

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

9. CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY 2020 - 2040 - UPDATE

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

The Chair requested an update from the Officers regarding their progress on communication and engagement outside of the local government network. Officers responded that while progress had been made, further work remained in this area. They noted that although most discussions had been met with a positive reception, there was still a need for more targeted engagement on specific matters of relevance to certain organisations.

A Member, also the Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee asked why there was no forecast change to Carbon sequestration levels. Officers responded that they had taken a conservative approach to calculating the carbon sequestration, as they had a project underway this year to reassess the carbon sequestration baseline. Officers noted that once a tree had been planted, it took a long time for carbon sequestration to take effect. They explained that they believed sequestration may increase beyond the forecast 16.23 kilotons, but they did not yet have evidence to prove this. The Member requested that the chart be extended past 2027 to a suitable time when the sequestration may take effect. Officers agreed with this suggested approach.

The Member also asked Officers how they would ensure that they could afford the maintenance of the new fire fogging equipment. Officers explained that the new equipment was initially bought at the recommendation of a wildfire consultant following the heat wave in 2022. They noted that they had been able

to maintain this equipment themselves with in-house mechanics and workshops. Officers stated that the three additional Fire Foggers that had been purchased had equipped Hampstead Heath, Ashted Common, Burnham Beeches, and Wanstead Flat. The Member expressed concern that there was no maintenance fund for this equipment.

A Member, also the Chair of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee, noted that 'Carbon Removals' seemed like a narrow title, noting that it was partly about climate resilience. Officers acknowledged that it was a narrow title, noting that the projects that were under this fund encompassed both protection and creating additional sequestration. The Member also queried how much of the nature recovery budget would be left to fund matters such as climate resilience. Officers responded that the resilience of open spaces was partially picked up through the Cool Streets and Greening programme within the City, and partially through the project on Carbon Removals. However, Officers acknowledged that resilience was not addressed sufficiently when the strategy was set up, and there was the opportunity to change this moving forward. Officers clarified that climate resilience was part of this bid.

A Member sought clarification on the scope of carbon removals and net zero targets. Officers explained that the net zero target for March 2027 included all of the City Corporation's activities inside and outside of the Square Mile, encompassing all open spaces. They further noted that the 2040 target was for the jurisdiction of the Square Mile, separate from the City Corporation's operations.

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

10. **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.

The Chair noted that, moving forward it would be important for the Committee to consider where the risks had been accepted, and where mitigation action would need to be taken.

A Member asked about the role of staff in managing fire risk when a fire was identified, particularly in light of the recent acquisition of additional fire-response equipment. Officers acknowledged the question and advised that they would consider the matter and provide a response in due course.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Considered and noted the Natural Environment Cross-Divisional Risk Register as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

- Considered and noted the content of the report, the City Gardens Risk Register at set out in Appendix 2 of the report, and the action being taken to effectively manage those risks.

11. **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT COMPLEMENTARY LAND POLICY AND COMPLEMENTARY LAND USE APPRAISAL**

The Committee discussed a report of the Executive Director of Environment which Environment which proposed the scope and terms of reference for two specific pieces of work to review and improve management of the development of an updated Complementary Land Policy, and a Complementary Land Use Appraisal.

Officers clarified with Members that the report would be going to all of the Natural Environment Charities, and feedback would be gathered and analysed to inform any changes to the final terms of reference. The Chair noted that he was eager for the Natural Environment Charities to work together to form a narrative that informed the Policy and Resources Committee's decisions.

A Member requested that consideration be given to a proactive approach to managing open spaces owned by the City Corporation, such as Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest, to establish a forum in collaboration with local authorities and key stakeholders, to enable swift action if necessary, when opportunities to acquire land arose. Officers responded that the complementary land policy was intended to be applicable to future land purchases and existing land owned by the City Corporation. Officers noted that the policy should help to identify potential future acquisitions.

The Member clarified that they were asking about having a formal arrangement with the surrounding local authorities, noting that this would help in situations where the City Corporation wanted to purchase land near Hampstead Heath but faced uncooperative owners. The Member noted that having a formal agreement with the local authorities would allow the City Corporation to use the threat of compulsory land purchase and negotiate more effectively to avoid inflated prices. Officers responded that they held regular meetings with their local authority partners, and they would add this matter to the agenda for future meetings. Officers also noted they would liaise with the City Solicitor's Department to determine what options would be available in this regard. Another Member, also the Chairman of Epping Forest and the Commons, acknowledged the potential value of compulsory land purchase orders and other legal tools available.

The Member also emphasised that the majority of the complementary land, with the exception of Heathfield House, was under the jurisdiction of Epping Forest and the Commons. The Member expected that the proposal to shift the management of this land to a broader Natural Environment division may face resistance from the Epping Forest and the Commons Committee. They emphasised that the transition would need to be managed carefully.

The Member believed that these policies could make the City Corporation's governance structure more complicated as the complementary land policy would have to go to all the Natural Environment committees, including those that did

not have complementary land. The Member noted that they wished to empower the charities to focus on matters relevant to their responsibilities. Officers responded that they had taken the approach to ensure policies were consistent across the natural environment division and aligned with both the Environment Department and City Corporation policies. Officers acknowledged that specific circumstances applied to individual charities. They explained the aim was to have a core policy that could be applicable to a number of charities, with appendices that related to the special circumstances of individual charities, such as Epping Forest and the Commons. The Member urged caution with moving forward with this policy, noting that the Epping Forest Buffer Land was purchased for a specific reason and was not a corporate asset that would be directed elsewhere.

The Executive Director of Environment explained that they were approaching this project by taking the terms of reference to committees first, in order to gather feedback from Members that would inform the development of the policy. The Chair emphasised that they must be strategic in developing this policy and approach it with future generations in mind.

A Member commented that some of the policies could not be developed until they knew the outcome of the Natural Environment Charity Review. The Member noted that the Epping Forest Buffer Land had been managed by the Epping Forest Charity since it was purchased and expressed concern that the time and resources spent by Officers of one charity would be fulfilling the role of another. Officers responded that the Member's comments would be noted and would be checked with the City Solicitor's Department.

The Chair noted to Members that a Frequently Asked Questions information sheet was being prepared and would be circulated to Members in the next week.

A Member observed that the terms of reference did not explicitly acknowledge the national and international responsibilities associated with the Sites of Special Scientific Interest, or the conservation of ancient trees. Officers responded that this would be captured in the site-by-site assessment where it was applicable. They also confirmed that the overarching policy would incorporate non-monetary values, such as carbon storage and biodiversity.

A Member expressed concern about a potential conflict of interest between the City Corporation's objectives and the best interests of the charities. They noted that, at present, all stakeholder groups were receiving legal advice from a single source acting on behalf of the City Corporation. The Chair noted that this would be something that should be flagged to the Policy and Resources Committee, and all Members.

A Member thanked Officers and Chairs for the time spent on this project. They noted that their first high-level concern was that the Policy and Resources Committee and the Finance Committee would make the final decision on this policy. The Member highlighted a perceived lack of confidence among the Natural Environment Charities on whether these committees possess the knowledge and skill base to make informed decisions on a policy that would shape long-term direction. The Member cautioned that this could lead to challenges in the future.

The Member remarked that, politically, the issue was closely tied to the broader demand for housing. They expressed concern that this would likely influence the direction taken when the matter was considered by the Policy and Resources Committee. The Member cautioned that there must be greater clarity regarding the extent to which the Committee would be willing to go on this matter.

As a final comment, the Member noted that there was concern among Chairs regarding the external communications on this matter. They emphasised the urgent need for a proactive communication strategy that was ready to respond to the queries from the public and local authorities.

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

12. TRANSFORMATION FOR THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITIES – PROJECT UPDATE AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Environment which provided an update on project governance arrangements as the work transitioned to implementation phase.

A Member queried why the report was presented for information only. Officers clarified that the purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on the anticipated timeline for key decisions coming before the Committee, and to outline the future presentation of the project. The Chair noted that he would be holding a separate meeting to review the intended purpose of reports and assured the Member that their feedback would be considered as part of that discussion.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the work to date on implementation of improvements identified by the NECR across assets, grant funding, governance and income generation.
- Noted the upcoming reporting schedule to bring detailed updates on these four areas.

13. CITY GARDENS UPDATE - VERBAL

The Committee received a verbal update on City Gardens from Officers from the Environment Department which provided an update on City Gardens projects.

A Member queried whether the Committee would receive a Gateway 6 report on the Jubilee Gardens project. Officers responded that once the final Gateway report had been considered at the Streets and Walkways Sub Committee, it come to the Natural Environment Board for information. The Member requested that this report address the consideration that had been given to the lack of bins in the gardens.

The Member also queried when the Finsbury Circus Gardens would be opened. Officers responded that the gardens would be partially opened on Tuesday 6 May 2025, with the public opening taking place on Wednesday 4 June 2025.

RESOLVED – That, Members noted the verbal update.

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

There were no questions raised.

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

There was no urgent business.

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 6 February 2025 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

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

There were no questions raised in non-public.

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

There were no non-public items of urgent business.

The meeting ended at 11.00am

Chairman

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