

## **EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, 29 May 2025**

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at  
Committee Rooms - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 29 May 2025 at  
1.45 pm

### **Present**

#### **Members:**

Deputy Caroline Haines (Chair)  
Deputy Benjamin Murphy (Deputy Chairman)  
George Abrahams  
Elizabeth Corrin  
Deputy Jaspreet Hodgson  
Gregory Lawrence  
Alderman Sir Nicholas Lyons  
David Sales  
Verderer Michael Chapman DL  
Verderer William Kennedy  
Verderer Paul Morris  
Verderer Nicholas Munday  
Charles Edward Lord, OBE JP (Ex-Officio Member)

#### **Officers:**

Pauline Mouskis	- Chamberlain's Department
Jack Joslin	- City Bridge Foundation
Edward Wood	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Katie Stewart	- Executive Director, Environment
Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Tanith Cook	- Environment Department
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Environment Department
Juliane Heinecke	- Environment Department
Joanne Hill	- Environment Department
Jo Hurst	- Environment Department
Laura Lawson	- Environment Department
Geoff Sinclair	- Environment Department
Tristan Vetta	- Environment Department
Callum Southern	- Town Clerk's Department
Zoe Williams	- Town Clerk's Department

### **1. APOLOGIES**

At the outset of the meeting, Alderman Sir Nicholas Lyons, as senior Member present, was moved into the Chair.

Apologies for absence were received from Alderman Sir Vincent Keaveny and Philip Woodhouse.

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

Verderer Nicholas Munday made a declaration of interest as they had recently been appointed as a trustee of the Copped Hall Trust. The Member noted this had been recorded in the register of interests.

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

The Committee received the Order of the Court of Common Council dated 25 April 2025.

4. **ELECTION OF CHAIR**

The Committee proceeded to elect a Chair in accordance with Standing Order No. 28.

Deputy Caroline Haines, as the only Member expressing their willingness to serve, was duly elected as Chair for the ensuing year and took the Chair.

**RESOLVED** – That, Deputy Caroline Haines be elected Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee for the ensuing year.

The Chair thanked the Committee and made opening remarks.

5. **ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR**

The Committee proceeded to elect a Deputy Chair in accordance with Standing Order No. 29.

Deputy Benjamin Murphy, as the only Member expressing their willingness to serve, was duly elected as Deputy Chair for the ensuing year.

**RESOLVED** – That, Deputy Benjamin Murphy be elected Deputy Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee for the ensuing year.

Gregory Lawrence moved a vote of thanks to Deputy Benjamin Murphy, the outgoing Chairman.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee wish to express our sincere appreciation to

DEPUTY BENJAMIN MURPHY

for his exceptional leadership and unwavering commitment during his tenure as Chairman of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

Ben's time as Chair has been marked by resilience, innovation, and a deep respect for the natural environment. Despite navigating significant challenges—including budget reductions, the aftermath of the pandemic, and structural reviews—he remained steadfast in championing the value of open spaces for both community wellbeing and ecological sustainability.

Under his guidance, the Committee secured an additional £1 million in local risk funding, increased staffing by 25%, and addressed longstanding health and safety concerns. He also led the development of a refreshed strategy and risk register, ensuring a more robust and forward-looking approach to governance.

Ben's passion for volunteerism has been transformative. From launching the first Volunteer Guide and the "50 for 50" campaign to initiating inclusive events like Lend a Hand Day, he has reinvigorated community engagement. Over 51,000 volunteer hours were logged during his tenure—an extraordinary contribution equivalent to over half a million pounds in value.

His legacy includes the creation of new learning trails, the restoration of heritage sites, and the celebration of biodiversity—from tree plantings and fungi discoveries to the launch of augmented reality tools and inclusive play areas. He was also pivotal in the celebration of the Rangers Golden Jubilee, championing the recognition of long-serving volunteers, and supporting the recruitment of diverse new voices across the organisation.

Ben's leadership has left an enduring mark on Epping Forest and the Commons. We thank him for his vision, energy, and heartfelt dedication to protecting and enhancing these treasured landscapes for generations to come.

Thank you, Ben.

The Deputy Chair expressed his gratitude to the Committee, Officers, and volunteer organisations for their support during his Chairmanship.

The Chair expressed appreciation to Alderman Bronek Masojada, who recently stepped down from the Committee.

The Chair welcomed Elizabeth Corrin as a new Member of the Committee. The Chair also welcomed James St John Davis and Charles Edward Lord OBE JP, Chair and Deputy Chair of the Natural Environment Board, to the Committee as ex-officio Members.

A Member noted concerns they had about governance structure, and that these would be raised at relevant points in the meeting. The Chair assured the Member that these concerns would be noted.

**8. APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AND GROUPS AND REPRESENTATIVES ON OTHER BODIES**

The Committee considered a report of the Town Clerk about appointments to consultative committees and groups, and representatives on other bodies.

**RESOLVED – That:**

- a) Members noted that the appointments to the Epping Forest Consultative Group were as follows:
  - Deputy Caroline Haines (ex-officio)
  - Deputy Benjamin Murphy (ex-officio)
  - Verderer Michael Chapman
  - Verderer William Kennedy
  - Verderer Paul Morris
  - Verderer Nicholas Munday
  - i. That, the terms of reference for the Epping Forest Consultative Group be amended to reflect the appointment of 6 Members from the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, inclusive of the Chair and Deputy Chair as ex-officio Members.
  - ii. That, Verderer Paul Morris continue as Chair of the Epping Forest Consultative Group for the ensuing year.
- b) Members noted that the appointments to the Ashted Common Consultative Group were as follows, with the exception of any Members who were not in attendance at the meeting:
  - Deputy Caroline Haines (ex-officio)
  - Deputy Benjamin Murphy (ex-officio)
  - Verderer Michael Chapman
  - i. That, the terms of reference for the Ashted Common Consultative Group be amended to reflect the appointment of 3 from the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, inclusive of the Chair and Deputy Chair as ex-officio Members.
- c) Members noted that the appointments to the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultative Groups were as follows:
  - Deputy Caroline Haines (ex-officio)
  - Deputy Benjamin Murphy (ex-officio)
  - Verderer Paul Morris
  - i. That, the terms of reference for the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultative Group be amended to reflect the appointment of 3 Members from the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, inclusive of the Chair and Deputy Chair as ex-officio Members.

- d) Members noted the appointments to the West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Common Consultative Group were as follows, with the exception of any Members who were not in attendance at the meeting:
- Deputy Caroline Haines (ex-officio)
  - Deputy Benjamin Murphy (ex-officio)
- i. That, the terms of reference for the West Wickham, Spring Park and Coulsdon Common Consultative Group be amended to reflect the appointment of the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.
- e) Members noted the appointments to the Deer Management Oversight Group were as follows:
- Verderer Michael Chapman
  - Verderer William Kennedy
  - Verderer Nicholas Munday
  - Gregory Lawrence
  - George Abrahams
- i. That, the terms of reference for the Deer Management Oversight Group be amended to reflect the appointment of 5 Members from the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.
- ii. That, Verderer William Kennedy continue as Chair of the Deer Management Oversight Committee for the ensuing year.

## 7. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** – That, the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on 23 January 2025 be approved as an accurate record.

### Matters arising

Clarification was provided in relation to car parking fees for multiple cars at Burnham Beeches. Officers noted that car park users could register two cars, for a slightly higher price, but only one car was allowed on site at a time.

Additionally, the Chair suggested that in future Members receive information packs only in digital form, rather than hard copy papers, moving forward. The Chair noted that the Town Clerk would contact Members following the meeting to get an indication of preference. A Member noted their disagreement for this proposal and that they would like to continue receiving information packs in hard copy.

The Chair advised Members that in future, any inquiries regarding informational items should be submitted to the Town Clerk at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. A Member disagreed with the proposal, concerned they could not ask questions arising from the meeting discussion. Additionally, a Member queried

whether they could receive papers earlier than when they were usually published. The Chair responded they would discuss this with Officers after the meeting. The Deputy Chair explained to Members that giving advance notice for questions allows Officers to ensure that the right people were in the room to answer the questions. Another Member suggested there be more flexibility in this approach by encouraging Members to ask questions 48 hours in advance, rather than requiring this.

## **8. MATTERS ARISING**

### **a) Action Log**

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk which provided an updated Action Log.

Regarding the Biodiversity Net Gain update, Officers explained that the consultants had presented their draft finding to Officers and the Committee would receive a finance summary report on this matter in the next Committee meeting.

In response to clarification sought by the Deputy Chairman, the Chair confirmed that this item would be taken off the action log and moved to the Committee's forward plan.

The Chair explained that future information about the action log would be presented in a different form in future meetings.

## **Burnham Beeches & The Commons**

## **9. INCOMING CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION: BURNHAM BEECHES & THE COMMONS**

The Chair made an introduction to the Burnham Beeches and the Commons portion of the agenda, and the separation between the charities.

## **10. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S GOLDEN THREAD**

The Committee received a verbal presentation from the Assistant Director about the overarching themes for high-level plans over the next three years.

## **11. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (SUPERINTENDENT) REPORT**

The Committee received a report from the Executive Director, Environment which presented key data for Burnham Beeches and the Commons for the period January 2025 – March 2025.

The Chair congratulated the Burnham Beeches Ranger for his 43 years of service.

The Deputy Chair commented that there was a growing desire for more liaison with various Government agencies. They noted that there had been helpful liaison with the London Borough of Bromley about integrating volunteers into existing groups in the local community and gaining access to S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding. The Deputy Chair commented that it would be helpful for Officers to consider how the planning framework fit into the high-level plans for the next three years. Officers agreed, commenting this would be a significant part of the landscape working. They commented that there were a range of planning and development issues on the horizon, highlighting the need to determine views on these and begin considering income generation options.

A Member sought assurance that fire prevention was included in the future plans. Officers responded that the plan was high-level and fire prevention processes were always under review. They noted that the processes employed on the wildfire earlier in the year had proved to be effective.

In response to a query about the Ancient Tree Forum Conference being hosted on 25 and 26 June 2025, Officers explained that it was a two-day international conference that would outline the research and work that had been done on the biodiversity of ancient and pollard trees.

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

## **12. NATURE RESILIENCE AND LANDSCAPE**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Assistant Director about nature resilience and landscape.

The Chair noted that in the next Committee meeting, Members would consider the membership and terms of reference of the Epping Forest and the Commons Member Oversight Groups.

## **13. ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024 - BURNHAM BEECHES AND STOKE COMMON**

The Committee received a joint report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which presented the final version of the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024 for Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.

Officers explained that this report was filed with the Charity Commission before the required deadline, however due to its timing it was not able to be considered at the previous Epping Forest and the Commons Committee meeting.

**RESOLVED –** That, Members noted the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the 2023/24 Financial Year.

14. **ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024 - WEST WICKHAM COMMON AND SPRING PARK WOOD AND COULSDON AND OTHER COMMONS**

The Committee received a joint report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which presented the final versions of the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024 for both West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood.

Officers explained that while the report had now been submitted, they had been unable to meet the Charity Commission's reporting deadline this year as it had taken time to link the two charities and be compliant with Charity Commission regulations. They further noted that two separate reports for each of the charities had to be produced. Officers commented that operations had returned to normal and they did not expect these reporting issues in the future.

The Deputy Chair commented that moving forward, it would be useful for the Committee to consider these reports as a 'for discussion' item, before it was submitted to the Charity Commission. They explained that this would allow the Committee to have more input into the content of the report and recommend amendments to the Audit and Risk Management Committee. Officers agreed with this comment and assured the Deputy Chair that were intending to take that approach for the current reporting period. They explained they were in the process of arranging this, and noted there were some difficulties due to the timing of Committee meetings in the year.

The Deputy Chair explained to Members that the reason for linking the two charities was that all of the assets were being shared between the sites, so it was decided that they would be consolidated for reporting purposes, whilst retaining the two separate charities.

Officers commented that in the future they would incorporate more fundraising requests into the annual report, as part of the output from the Natural Environment Charity Review.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members noted the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the 2023/24 Financial Year for both charities.

**Epping Forest**

15. **INCOMING CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION: EPPING FOREST**

The Chair made an introduction to the Epping Forest portion of the agenda and explained to Members the proposal for three additional Member Oversight Groups. They noted that these would have a focus on the upcoming 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Epping Forest Act 1878; wildlife and biodiversity; and engagement and access. The Chair noted that Members would be contacted about these groups before the next meeting to identify what oversight groups they would like to be a part of.



The Assistant Director (Superintendent) outlined the key themes and Golden Thread of Epping Forest's plan for 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28.

#### **16. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which presented updates on business activity delivered in Epping Forest for the period January to April 2025.

The Chair acknowledged the work that had gone into preparing for Volunteer Week, which was taking place in the coming week, and encouraged Members to extend their congratulations to any volunteers they encountered at Epping Forest.

A Member noted that it would be helpful for the plans discussed in the previous item to be developed further so they could be used as guiding principles to help inform the committee of the progress being made in those areas.

The Member commented that managing Epping Forest and the complementary land as a whole had allowed the Superintendent to develop bold plans. They also highlighted the distinction between the land governed by the Epping Forest Act 1878 and the complementary land, emphasising that any attempt to separate this would need to be carefully managed.

A Member thanked Officers for the work that had been done on the car parks, noting that this had been well overdue.

The Deputy Chair commented that the Ranger of Epping Forest recently invited two of the forest's longest-serving volunteers to a garden party at Buckingham Palace, which the Deputy Chair also attended. They expressed hope that such recognition of the volunteers work at Epping Forest continued and noted improvement in how volunteer contributions were being celebrated.

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

#### **17. MEMBERSHIP OF THE EPPING FOREST CONSULTATIVE GROUP**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which summarised the applications received and made recommendations for the appointment of twenty members to the Epping Forest Consultative Group.

The Chair noted this would likely go through a revaluation reassessment in the coming year's cycle, and that there had been some new groups included in the list detailed in appendix 1 of the report.

A Member commented that improvements were needed to the operation of the Epping Forest Consultative Group, particularly in how the discussion was communicated back to Members. The Chair acknowledged that they would need

to find a way to improve the communication processes. Officers noted that the revised terms of reference reflected the Consultative Group's preference for a more collaborative approach, favouring site visits and workshops over the previous format of three formal meetings. They explained that there would be an Annual General Meeting held where business would be recorded. Officers commented that they would need to work out how an effective two-way feedback mechanism could be developed.

A Member congratulated Officers on the increase in both the number and diversity of the groups involved, noting that the organisations represented in the Consultative Group reflected the diversity of Epping Forest. The Chair added that this demonstrated the system was functioning effectively, though there remained a need to refine communication processes.

**RESOLVED – That, Members:**

- Appointed the 20 organisations recommended in appendix 1 of the report to the Epping Forest Consultative Group.
- Extended thanks to the organisations that had applied, particularly those who had attended for the last three years but had been unsuccessful in their application.

## **18. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which provided the Epping Forest and Commons Committee with assurance that risk management procedures in place within the Environment Department were satisfactory and that they met the requirements of the Corporate Risk Management Framework and the Charities Act 2011.

A Member expressed concern about the removal of the reference to the Committee "acting as Trustee of the charity" in the Annual Report and Financial Statements recently filed with the Charity Commission. In their view, this meant that the Committee was no longer responsible for the management of the charity in the eyes of the Commission. Officers responded that they had written to the Member prior to the meeting to provide an explanation for the change, and that there was nothing to prevent the Committee from proceeding with the items on the meeting's agenda.

Officers clarified that the risk score for the declining condition of built assets and infrastructure in Epping Forest had been reduced to 12, as heritage assets were now treated as a separate risk category. They also noted that the health and safety risk score for Epping Forest and the condition of asset risk score for Ashted Common had been reduced following work that resolved key issues.

The Deputy Chair queried whether 12 was an appropriate risk score for heritage assets and whether there was enough focus in this area. Officers noted that they would consider this when the risks were reviewed.

The Deputy Chair commented on the negative impact of development and encroachment reflected in the Epping Forest Risk Register. They noted that the register only referenced Epping Forest and emphasised that it should also acknowledge that Surrey would also fall under the devolution arrangements. Officers responded that they would consider this matter in the Ashted Commons Risk Register.

In response to clarification sought, Officers assured a Member that visitor pressure was included in the Epping Forest Risk Register, under 'Negative impacts of development and encroachment'.

A Member was interested in whether there was a delineation between the ownership of risk in Epping Forest land and complementary land. They queried whether Warren House was considered part of the Epping Forest risk portfolio. Officers responded that the risk register did not reflect that Warren House was Epping Forest risk. They explained that Warren House was an anomaly in this case, and it had not been identified in the risk register as it was not considered as local risk, and there was not the budget or management responsibility for it. They also noted that, unlike some of the other assets on the risk register, it had not been included in the Heritage at Risk Register. Officers commented that they would be considering this in more detail in the future.

Another Member noted that this highlighted the governance issues and conflicts of interest that were arising. The Chair acknowledged the concern and indicated that it would be addressed under a later agenda item. Officers noted that where Warren House risk sat was up to the Controller of Premises Policies within the City Corporation's Health and Safety Department, rather than with the ownership of the land. Officers explained that more clarity would be achieved once those policies had been revised and redrafted.

A Member expressed concern that the issues surrounding Warren House had been raised on numerous occasions, and the issue had not yet been directly addressed. They cautioned that, without appropriate action, the Committee risked revisiting the same discussion in future years. The Chair responded that the ongoing reviews, along with their associated deadlines, would help move the matter closer to resolution.

A Member noted that, during a recent visit to Great Gregories Farm they noticed issues such as asbestos roofs, walls that were in disrepair, and sub-standard amenities. They queried why this was not addressed in the risk register. Officers responded that there was a lot captured in the risk register that was summarised in wider headings. They noted that Great Gregories Farm came under the 'Decline in condition of built assets and infrastructure'. The Deputy Chair noted that the Cyclical Works Programme captured many of these issues. They assured Members that the issues at Great Gregories Farm had been raised with the Superintendent and would be addressed through the Cyclical Works Programme.

The Chair questioned why the report format did not provide clarity for these assets, and whether consideration should be given to reclassifying Great Gregories Farm as a red risk. Officers responded that each risk category encompassed a broad range of individual items. They clarified that not every asset was assigned a separate risk in this report format, as many were addressed through the Cyclical Works Programme. Officers assured Members that the risk scoring was reviewed each time the report was produced and that the Committee's comments would be considered in the next update.

In response to a Member's query, the Deputy Chair clarified that the Warren House was a complementary asset. The Deputy Chair expressed concern that the Warren House was not identified as a red risk, given that there was no plan to manage the heritage asset. They requested that Officers reassess this risk for the next update. The Executive Director agreed that this risk would be reassessed.

In reference to their previous question concerning visitor pressure, a Member requested that visitor pressure was mentioned in risk 10 of the report, as the current risk appeared to focus more on housing. Officers responded that this matter would be taken away to be considered.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members confirmed, on behalf of the City Corporation as Trustee, that the risk registers appended to the report satisfactorily set out the key risks to each of the five charities and that appropriate systems were in place to identify and mitigate risks.

#### 19. **EPPING FOREST SSSI FEATURE CONDITION SURVEYS UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which summarised Epping Forest's Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) condition assessments and provided updates on assessments completed in 2024 and those proposed for 2025-2028.

The Deputy Chair questioned whether the rest of the cycle for the SSSI assessments were on track. Officers responded that they were in contact with Natural England and that the acid grassland surveys were scheduled to begin the following month. They noted that the remaining surveys were still on track as planned through to 2028. Officers added that they would continue to follow up and seek clarification on the process, particularly for the specialist surveys that would need to be commissioned by Natural England.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members noted the report and the change to the SSSI monitoring approach, the condition assessments and updates from 2024 and the proposed condition assessment monitoring for 2025-2028.

#### 20. **FOREST KEEPER ROTA AND RECRUITMENT UPDATE PRESENTATION**

The Committee received a verbal presentation from Officers of the Environment department which updated Members on the progress made in creating the new Forest Keeper rota and ongoing recruitment.

The Chair commended the Officer on the presentation and how the issue of the rota had been addressed.

The Committee extended its thanks to the Officer for an excellent verbal report.

A Member expressed deep concern over the ongoing challenges the department faced with regard to the Forest Keeper Rota. They emphasised the need for collective awareness of the severity of the issue. It was noted that they rarely encountered keepers in the Forest, due to the insufficient staffing levels. Another Member observed that the Verderers had been raising this issue consistently throughout the Target Operating Model (TOM) review and questioned why it had been allowed to persist. In response, the Chair noted that all key Officers present were new to their roles since the TOM review and that significant changes had taken place since then.

A Member commended Officers for their efforts under challenging circumstances.

*As this point, the Chair sought approval from the Committee to continue the meeting beyond two hours from the appointed time for the start of the meeting, in accordance with Standing Order 39, and this was agreed.*

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

The Committee discussed a report of the Executive Director, Environment which proposed the scope and terms of reference for two specific pieces of work to review and improve management of assets originally purchased by the City Corporation to support charity operations, being the development of an updated Complementary Land Policy and a Complementary Land Use Appraisal.

The Chair thanked Officers for holding additional sessions with Members about this matter to improve the communication channels.

The Chair noted that Members had received an email from the Epping Forest Heritage Trust about the Complementary Land Policy, followed by a posting of a public message. The Chair expressed their disappointment about this and requested that Members discuss anything specific in reference to organisations or people in non-public session.

A Member noted that the terms of reference should make more reference to the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, and the Epping Forest Charity, rather than being just a consultee. They also requested that the terms of reference were

amended to reflect that any consultant considering complementary land should have regard to the present and historic use of the land. The Member highlighted that the current terms of reference focussed too much on the City Corporation and did not reflect what happens in Epping Forest.

Officers explained the reasoning for changing the name from buffer land to complementary land, stating that they were taking an integrated holistic approach across the Natural Environment division. They explained that there were other parcels of complementary land across the Natural Environment Charities, in addition to the land at Epping Forest, which was not described as buffer land and did not serve the same purpose. Therefore, Officers explained that they were developing a policy to apply to all those parcels of land. They noted there were specific issues, restrictions and history relating to each of the separate sites, and assured Members that specific appendices to accompany the complementary land policy would be developed in these instances. They assured Members that the policy would encompass the key reasons why Epping Forest Buffer Land was designated and that its importance would be reflected in the assets appraisal.

Concerning the potential conflict of interest raised by the Chair, Officers noted that they were developing a comprehensive handbook for Members as trustees of the Natural Environment Charities so that they could ensure the City Corporation's responsibilities as a corporate trustee flowed down to the Members of the Natural Environment Charities. They explained that this handbook would have a section that would address potential and existing internal conflicts of interest. Officers noted that the Committee would consider a draft version of this handbook in its July meeting. Officers assured Members that they would engage the Committee at the earliest opportunities throughout development of the complementary land policy and assets appraisal.

A Member questioned whether the change in terminology should have been a matter for decision by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee. In response, the Chair clarified that complementary land also referred to land held by other Natural Environment charities outside of Epping Forest. The Chair asked whether the buffer land associated with Epping Forest would continue to be referred to as 'buffer land' to preserve consistency in language. Officers confirmed that this terminology could be incorporated into the policy and the asset appraisal, acknowledging its significance in reflecting the land's historical context.

A Member observed that potential conflicts of interest were inherent within the City Corporation's structure but were typically managed by enabling committees to fulfil their designated roles and responsibilities. They noted that the Committee was typically the decision-making body for Epping Forest and expressed concern that the Committee was only being treated as a consultee. The Chair acknowledged the Members concern, noting that they had emphasised to the Policy and Resources Committee that they must do things 'with' the Natural Environment Charities, rather than 'to' them. They noted that as this process began from a decision at the Policy and Resources Committee, this had been difficult to do.

The Executive Director informed Members that, although the issue had arisen during discussions at the Policy and Resources Committee, it had already been recognised that such matters would need to be addressed through the Natural Environment Charity Review. They explained that the City Corporation was now seeking to develop a more coherent approach to asset management across the organisation, acknowledging that this had not always been effectively handled in the past. The Executive Director noted that this presented an opportunity to review the purpose of these sites, and to consider how the City Corporation's resources could be better utilised to allow them to reach their potential.

A Member expressed concern about the governance process and conflicts of interest, highlighting that key decisions were being made by other Committees. They stated that they didn't trust the advice they had been given, noting that it was produced or obtained by Officers of the City Corporation that were setting the direction for the work. The Member emphasised the Committee's duty, as the Grand Committee responsible for Epping Forest, to pause and reassess the current direction. The Member also requested that separate independent legal advice be provided to the Committee on the matter.

The Deputy Chair reminded Members that this process had always been needed and clarified that it was not intended to be about selling the assets. They also highlighted the City Corporation's public commitment to protecting the buffer land, and its alignment with the Climate Action Strategy and long-term goals for carbon sequestration.

The Deputy Chair noted that the term 'charity operations' in the terms of reference should be revised to 'charity objects' for greater accuracy. They emphasised the Committee's desire to be actively involved in the governance of the process and acknowledged the need to determine where such involvement would be appropriate. The Deputy Chair also highlighted the importance of managing potential conflicts of interest arising from the City Corporation's two capacities. Regarding the terminology of complementary land, the Deputy Chair explained how land had previously been identified and noted that the new terminology was much clearer. The Deputy Chair supported the Committee's role in reviewing the outcomes of the process and stressed the importance of ensuring that the appendices were site-specific, clearly detailing the history of each parcel of land.

A Member highlighted to the Committee that they must consider The Commons as part of this, in addition to Epping Forest, as they were part of the strategy. The Member also emphasised the importance of considering the history of all these areas.

A Member cautioned the Committee that the appraisal would lead to the selling of assets in the future and encouraged the Chair and Deputy Chair to be vocal in the Policy & Resources Committee on this matter.

A Member proposed that both the Superintendent and Members be included in the Task and Finish Group, as they would offer constructive input. They noted the uncertainty surrounding the future use of the land and emphasised the

importance of considering its historical context while planning for the present and future. The Member supported the review of whether the land was being used appropriately and expressed the view that the Epping Forest and Commons Committee should play a more active role in the process, rather than serving solely as a consultee.

Officers provided a summary of the feedback that had been received from Members.

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

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

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

**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 bringing detailed updates on these four areas.

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

A Member requested clarification on the Forest Keeper rota, specifically asking whether all filled and available positions were for five working days per week. The Chair noted that relevant Officers would respond in due course.

**25. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There was no urgent business.

**25. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** – That, the following matters relate to business under the remit of the Court of Common Council acting for the City Corporation as charity Trustee, to which Part VA and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 public access to meetings provisions do not apply. The following items contain sensitive information which it is not in the best interests of the charity to consider in a public meeting (engaging similar considerations as under paragraphs 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act) and will be considered in non-public session.

**26. NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**



**RESOLVED** – That, Members approved the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2025.

**27. EPPING FOREST AND COMMONS COMMITTEE DIARY 2025/26**

Members received an update on the Epping Forest and Commons Committee Diary for 2025/26.

**28. BURNHAM BEECHES & THE COMMONS**

The Committee received a verbal update on Burnham Beeches & The Commons from the Assistant Director.

**29. GRANT OF EASEMENT (SEF 12-25)**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment.

**30. GRANT OF EASEMENT (SEF 11-25)**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment.

**31. PERMISSION TO LET (SEF 13-25)**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment.

**32. NON PUBLIC QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no non-public questions on matters relating to the work of the Committee.

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

There were no items of other business raised in non-public session that the Chair considered urgent.

**34. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That, Members approved the confidential minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 January 2025 in non-public session.

**The meeting ended at 4.29pm.**

-----

-----  
Chair

**Contact Officer: Zoe Williams**  
**[Zoe.Williams@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:Zoe.Williams@cityoflondon.gov.uk)**