

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD**  
**Thursday, 3 July 2025**

Minutes of the meeting of the Natural Environment Board held at Committee Rooms  
- 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 3 July 2025 at 11.00 am

**Present**

**Members:**

James St John Davis (Chair)  
Charles Edward Lord, OBE JP (Deputy Chair)  
Deputy Caroline Haines  
Deputy Benjamin Murphy  
William Upton KC  
Heather Barrett-Mold  
Catherine Bickmore (Observer)

**In attendance:**

Deputy Anne Corbett  
Alderman & Sheriff Gregory Jones KC (Ex-Officio Member)  
John Beyer (Observer)

**Officers:**

Jack Joslin	- City Bridge Foundation
Anna Cowperthwaite	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Ian Hughes	- Environment Department
Joanne Hill	- Environment Department
Jo Hurst	- Environment Department
Andrew Impey	- Environment Department
Joe Kingston	- Environment Department
Heinz Traut	- Environment Department
Zoe Williams	- Town Clerk's Department

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Karina Dostalova, Vladislav Dobrokhoto, Wendy Mead and Verderer Paul Morris.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That, the public minutes and non-public summary of the previous meeting held on Thursday 1 May 2025 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Karina Dostalova and John Beyer as new Members of the Committee.

4. **RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment that sought to provide assurance that risk management procedures in place within the Environment Department were satisfactory and that they meet the requirements of the Corporate Risk Management Framework and, where applicable, the Charities Act 2011.

The Chair acknowledged that work-related stress among staff was a recurring risk across Natural Environment Charities. They noted that during the West Ham Park Committee meeting, Members discussed how this could be monitored, and how they could achieve a balance the Committee's ambitions with the limited staff resources.

A Member observed that while work-related stress was listed on the risk register for the North London Open Spaces Committees, it did not appear on the risk register for the Natural Environment Board. They queried how the risk registers for these committees were aligned. Officers explained that the Natural Environment Board's risk register had been developed prior to those of the North London Open Spaces Committees. They confirmed that this would be considered during the next review of the Natural Environment Board's risk register.

A Member highlighted the need for caution when addressing the matter of work-related stress, noting its complexity. They emphasised the importance of clearly identifying the specific source of stress before determining how it should be addressed.

**RESOLVED – That, Members:**

- Considered and noted the content of the report and the Natural Environment Cross Divisional Summary Risk Register (as shown in Appendix 1 of the report).
- Consider and noted the content of the report and the City Gardens Summary Risk Register (as shown in Appendix 2 of the report).

5. **CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY UPDATE**

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

The Chair sought clarification on whether 10% of the City Corporation's tree sequestration remained at risk, despite the mitigation measures implemented. Officers responded that the actions taken were helping to alleviate the risk, and noted that the calculations were based on estimates, which allowed for a degree of variance.

A Member commented that they must clearly communicate the environmental and financial benefits of the work across the open spaces. They emphasised the importance of framing this work not as something being imposed by the City

Corporation, but as a valuable contribution to each charity's objectives, highlighting improvements such as soil health, longevity of ancient trees and cost efficiencies.

In response to a query, Officers confirmed that this work was being funded from the central fund through the Climate Action Strategy.

Another Member, also the Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, noted the success of the recent international conference on veteran trees. They noted that they needed to continue to promote the message that the City Corporation were international leaders in that space. Members commended the success of the international conference at Burnham Beeches. A Member emphasised the importance of engaging not only with other industry leaders, but also of considering the next steps in relation to policy.

The Member also noted an upcoming event being held at Copped Hall on Monday 13 October 2025 and encouraged Members to attend.

A Member commented that natural resources such as wood chips were useful in protecting the roots of trees as it discouraged people from walking in those areas. Another Member noted that in some sites they were allowing brambles to grow around the roots to achieve a similar effect. It was noted that using natural resources in this way was a creative and cost-effective approach that reduced the need for interventions such as fencing.

A Member sought clarity on whether the 210 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide equivalent in additional sequestration was a target for 2027 or if it was a measurement of what had been achieved. They also asked what was expected to happen following 2027. Officers confirmed that it was a target to achieve 210 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide equivalent in additional sequestration by March 2027. They noted that the largest component of this would be the transition from arable to meadow land at Copped Hall. Officers also noted that they were assessing what would be done after 2027. They commented that they were in discussion with site managers at various open spaces to identify future opportunities.

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

6. **ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT HIGH-LEVEL BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25 – YEAR-END PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which provided an update on progress made by the Natural Environment Division and the City Gardens Team towards delivery of the Environment Department's high-level Business Plan 2024/25.

A Member suggested that the report should begin to function as an impact report, clearly demonstrating how the corporate strategy was being delivered. They expressed concern that the current format was not achieving the intended outcome. The Chair agreed and proposed that a separate session be arranged

to explore a framework that could be recommended to Officers to support this approach.

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

7. **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITY REVIEW – UPDATE ON FUNDRAISING WORKSTREAMS**

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which detailed the progress since 2024 and the next stages of this workplan.

The Chair noted that the slides from the briefing on Biodiversity Net Gain which was held on 24 June 2025 would be circulated to Members.

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

8. **ASSETS UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update from Officers of the Environment Department about the work carried out on charity and complementary land assets.

A Member, also the Deputy Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee commented that there was a desire to continue to refer to the Epping Forest Buffer Land as such, whilst referring to complementary land across the Natural Environment Charities. They noted that there was some cross over in the report between these two terms in the update.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members noted the verbal update.

9. **CITY GARDENS UPDATE**

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 congratulated the City Gardens team on their work, noting that Little Trinity Gardens had attracted many people. They noted the garden's proximity to Thames River and commented that signage to the river would be useful for visitors. The Chair agreed and commented that technology should also be embraced in the move to encourage people to explore different parts of the Square Mile.

The Member also commented that City Gardens should have a higher profile within the Destination City growth strategy. The Chair noted that he would be meeting with the Deputy Chair and Officers to discuss how to move this forward.

Officers commented that their position and priorities within Destination City was beginning to evolve. They also noted that they were in discussion about what they would like to draw people towards within the Square Mile, and what wayfinding should direct people towards.

Officers also noted the proposed changes to project governance, noting that they aim to streamline the progression of smaller-scale projects, particularly relevant to work in City Gardens. They explained that the changes would reduce the need for frequent committee reports and Member signoff, shifting the focus towards more strategic engagement with Ward Members and the Committee. The Officer emphasised the importance of ensuring that Board Members remain well-briefed and had opportunities to contribute meaningfully, both as representatives of the Board and as Ward Members.

A Member queried how the Natural Environment Division's digital strategy connected with broader initiatives such as Destination City. They suggested that there may be scope for policy development to better align this work. They also highlighted the effective use of interpretive signage in the gardens at Buckingham Palace, where plant species and their ecological roles were clearly explained. They suggested that similar storytelling could be explored across City Gardens to better communicate the rationale behind planting choices, particularly in relation to the Climate Action Strategy. Officers responded that interpretative signage for Finsbury Circus Gardens was being finalised. They noted they would consider if there was an opportunity to introduce this signage in other gardens.

The Member also noted that constituents had expressed missing the 'Geoffrey Barkington' stone bench, which commemorated the historical origins of Houndsditch. They asked whether interpretive work could be undertaken to help communicate and preserve the story of Houndsditch in the area. Officers responded that they would consider this and respond in due course.

With regard to income generation, a Member expressed interest in exploring potential opportunities within City Gardens, including advertising, naming rights, and tour guide services. In response, Officers noted that institutions had approached them regarding sponsorship and naming rights for events at Finsbury Circus Gardens. They also mentioned the possibility of introducing a coffee cart in the gardens as a means of generating income. They noted that large-scale events would not be held in the garden this year due to the potential impact it could have on the newly established lawn.

Officers also noted that, while there had been interest in exploring income generation through advertising, longstanding City Corporation policies, including the Local Plan, contained a presumption against such activity. They acknowledged that advertising may present challenges and suggested that branding sponsorship could be considered separately and may offer a more suitable route for City Gardens.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members noted the verbal update.

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

There were no questions raised.

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

There was no urgent business.

12. **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.

13. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That, the non-public minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 1 May 2025 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

14. **CITY CORPORATION GOVERNANCE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITIES – UPDATE ON PLANNED CHANGES**

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment.

15. **COMPLEMENTARY LAND POLICY AND ASSETS APPRAISAL**

The Committee received a verbal update from Officers of the Environment Department.

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

There were no questions raised in non-public.

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

One matter of urgent business was raised in non-public.

**The meeting ended at 12.15pm**

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Chairman

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