

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Natural Environment Board – For Information	Dated: 23/10/2025
Subject: Enjoying Green Spaces and the Natural Environment – Annual Report 2024/25 and analysis of fund's impact over the last five years	Public
This proposal delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes:	Leading Sustainable Environment Diverse Engaged Communities Vibrant Thriving Destination
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Simon Latham, Interim Managing Director of City Bridge Foundation	For Information
Report author: Sheena Etches, Funding & Charity Management Lead	

Summary

The Central Grants Programme provides a portfolio of four funding programmes. The Enjoying Green Spaces and the Natural Environment (EGS) Funding Programme opened in 2016 and forms part of the Central Grants Programme (CGP). The EGS is managed on behalf of the Natural Environment Division (NE) by the Central Funding and Charity Management Team (CFCMT), formerly the Central Grants Unit. EGS has one funding round each year. This report provides an overview of projects funded through the EGS in the 2024/25 financial year alongside a comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the EGS over the last five years illustrating the contribution of the EGS to delivering both NE key strategies and City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes.

Recommendations

Members are asked:

1. To note the allocation of grants for 2024-25 approved under delegated authority (as at **Appendix 2**).
2. To note the key findings of the analysis of EGS funding programme over the last five years 2020/21 to 2024/25 (as at **Appendix 3**).

Main Report

Background

1. The Enjoying Green Spaces & the Natural Environment Fund (EGS) is one of a portfolio of four open grant funding programmes that form the City of London Corporation's (CoLC's) Central Grants Programme (CGP). The EGS opened in 2016 and the fund was reviewed in 2024 with this Committee agreeing changes to the EGS sub-themes/criteria and value of maximum grant at its meeting in May 2024.
2. The EGS funds projects where the majority of impact will be on the City of London Corporation's managed open spaces (Ashted Common, Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common, Epping Forest, Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, Queen's Park, The Coudsdon Commons, The West Wickham Commons, West Ham Park) and Bunhill Fields Burial Ground.
3. The minimum grant that an organisation can apply for is £2,000 and the maximum grant is £15,000. To avoid creating long term reliance on the EGS grants are awarded over a maximum of 3 years and organisations receiving grants for the same project for three years are required to have a fallow period of 12 months before reapplying to continue that work.
4. All EGS funded projects must either improve the conservation value of the chosen green spaces and/or improve our knowledge of the biodiversity of the green spaces. In addition funded projects must also meet at least one of the other three sub-themes/criteria: Connecting communities with their green spaces; Providing opportunities for children and young people to learn and have fun; Improving wellbeing through the use of green spaces. (For full details of the sub-themes see **Appendix 1**).
5. EGS has a 12-week decision turnaround allowing the fund to be responsive to immediate location needs.
6. The NE Board delegates decisions for the award of grants to the Natural Environment Director in consultation with your Chairman and Deputy Chairman.
7. A comprehensive grant management service for EGS and other City of London grant funding programmes is delivered by the CFCMT drawing on the team's expertise in the field of grant-making and in line with 'Open and Trusting' grant making practice. The CFCMT is a City of London-wide resource managing a number of other grant programmes on behalf of departments across the City of London including the Community Infrastructure Levy Neighbourhood Fund.
8. Management of the EGS process is aligned with the City's existing grant allocation process through the CFCMT. Applications to the EGS undergo a

process of due diligence, assessment and financial review by Funding Managers before sign off by a Senior CFCMT Officer. Eligible applications are then presented to the EGS Officer Panel for recommendation. The EGS Officer Panel comprises of Senior Officers from across NE Open Spaces and is chaired by the Natural Environment Director. At the EGS Officer Panel consideration is given to each proposal's alignment with the EGS criteria, outputs and outcomes, value for money in terms of social, environmental as well as financial value and equality considerations.

Enjoying Green Spaces & the Natural Environment 2024-25

9. In 2024/25 the CFCMT received 12 applications to the EGS – broadly in line with the average number of applications received over the last five years.
10. The CGP has an annual City's Estate budget of £220,000 split across three funding programmes, and additional funds specifically to deliver the Destination City Partnership Fund. In 2024/25 the EGS received an annual budget of £73,333 from the CGP to allocate to eligible applications. 7 grants were awarded totalling £73,540. A list of grants awarded and rejected can be found at **Appendix 2**.
11. Grant approval rate for 2024/25 was 58%. 25% of applications were rejected and 17% of applications were withdrawn during assessment by the applicant. (See **Appendix 3, Table 4**).
12. The average value of the grant awarded during 2024/25 was £10,506 substantially less than the funding programme maximum grant of £15,000. (See **Appendix 3, Table 1**).
13. 2024/25 was the first year that the number of multi-year grants (57% of grants awarded) exceeded the number of single year grants awarded (43%) and may reflect organisations' needs to plan further in advance.
14. In 2024/25 71% of EGS grants awarded were to small organisations with a turnover of less than £500k. (See **Appendix 3, Table 9**).

EGS Fund Analysis of Grants Awarded over the last 5 years

15. **Appendix 3** provides the first comprehensive analysis of the grants awarded by the EGS over the last five years (2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive) illustrating the contribution of the EGS in delivering both NE key strategies and City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes.
16. Over the last five years, 2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive, the EGS has distributed £384,444 in 35 grants to 24 unique organisations. (See **Appendix 3, Table 1**).

17. Over the last five years the average value of grant awarded has remained fairly constant ranging from an yearly average of £9,538 to £12,273. (See **Appendix 3, Table 1**).
18. Over the same period (2021/22 to 2024/25) applications to the EGS have also remained fairly constant except for a dip in applications in 2022/23 with an average of c.13 applications per year. (See **Appendix 3, Table 4**). Given that EGS funds available have remained more or less constant in the years that there are more applications the approval rate drops. Average approval rate for EGS over the last 5 years is 53%.
19. Although the EGS can award grants lasting for up to three years, over the last five years over two-thirds of EGS grants awarded (69%) have been for a single year.
20. Over the last five years 7 organisations have received two or more grants each. The maximum aggregate grant from the EGS over the last five years to any single organisation was £47,968 equivalent to 12% of the total grant spend over the last 5 years and the largest number of continuation/repeat grants awarded to the same applicant was 4. (See **Appendix 3, Table 6**).
21. Organisations receiving one or more grant were awarded 53% of the total EGS funding available over the last five years. With three organisations (Tindersticks, Epping Forest Heritage Trust, Capital Kids Cricket) between them awarded almost a third (31%) of the total funds available for distribution over the last five years. To ensure wider distribution of the funds available, in May 2024 the Natural Environment Committee agreed to limit the length of continuous funding to three years after which applicants seeking funding for the same work would require a fallow period of 12 months before they can reapply.
22. Over the last 5 years 37% of all EGS grants awarded (13 grants) were for projects located in Epping Forest (£137,191). (See **Appendix 3 Table 7**). The disparity in investment across the City of London Corporation's Open Spaces through the EGS may relate to the nature of the sites, recreational value, usage and/or association with a volunteer or area specific group wishing to lead projects. Two natural environment locations received no investment over the last 5 years through the EGS – Queens Park and West Wickham Commons – with Highgate Wood benefiting from a multi-site project.
23. Over the last five years 83% of EGS grants awarded were to small organisations with an annual turnover of less than £500k. Almost two thirds (63%) of all EGS grants awarded over the last five years were to 'very small' organisations with an annual turnover of less than £100k. (See **Appendix 3 Tables 8 & 9**).
24. Over the last five years 86% of funded projects met the criteria 'connecting communities with their green spaces' (**Community Engagement Strategy**), 60% of funded projects met the criteria 'improving the conservation value of the green spaces' (**Nature Conservation Resilience Strategy**), and 46% of

funded projects met the criteria of 'improving wellbeing through the use of green spaces' (**Culture Heritage Learning Strategy & Community Engagement Strategy**). (See **Appendix 3, Table 13**).

25. The EGS also delivers against four of the six CoL Corporate Plan strategic outcomes, significantly contributing to 'Leading Sustainable Environment' with 51% of all grants increasing biodiversity and 40% of all grants delivering climate mitigation. (See **Appendix 3, Table 14**). As expected given the focused sub-themes, EGS also strongly contributes to creating 'Diverse engaged communities' with 66% of all grants awarded delivering increased community cohesion and 20% of all grants reducing social isolation.
26. The EGS grant programme mainly delivers activities and services for general beneficiaries (80% of all grants) with approximately a quarter of all grants benefitting families (26%), or children (23%), or young people (23%). Many projects target more than one main beneficiary group. (See **Appendix 3 Table 15**).

Corporate & Strategic Implications

27. **Financial implications** – EGS sits under the Central Grants Programme which is funded on an ongoing basis, all grant assessment and management costs are covered by CFCMT budget.
28. **Resource implications** – Officer time to manage the EGS and review its impact will be provided by the CFCMT as part of the Team's responsibility for the CGP's management.
29. **Legal implications** – None
30. **Strategic implications** – The delivery of the EGS for communities using and enjoying the City of London Corporation managed open spaces across London aligns with NE key strategies and to the City Corporation's own Corporate Plan and stated aims of leading sustainable environment, providing excellent services and creating diverse engaged communities
31. **Risk implications** – All EGS grants are managed and monitored by Funding Managers within the CFCMT to mitigate risks in project delivery through provision of ongoing advice and support.
32. **Climate implications** – EGS funded projects deliver against the NE's Nature Conservation Resilience Strategy actively improving the conservation value of the green spaces and improving our knowledge of the biodiversity of the green spaces.
33. **Equalities implications** – The purpose of the EGS is to fund projects and services delivered for the benefit of communities or beneficiaries across City of London Corporation managed open spaces. 86% of the projects funded connect communities with their green spaces with 66% of funded projects increasing community cohesion. The CFCMT assess and manage all grants

according to best practice, ensuring Equity, Diversity and Inclusion considerations are built into each stage of the process.

34. **Security implications** – All EGS applications are considered in consultation with the Natural Environment team to ensure the safety of the public.

Conclusion

35. The EGS contributes to the delivery of both the NE's key strategies and the City of London's Corporate Plan strategic outcomes. The EGS remains the only City of London Corporation grant funding programme open to organisations delivering projects in and for the CoLC's open spaces across London by primarily working with small local organisations.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Central Grants Programme – Enjoying Green Spaces & the Natural Environment Sub-themes/criteria
- Appendix 2 – Central Grants Programme – Enjoying Green Spaces & the Natural Environment Grants decisions 2024/25
- Appendix 3 - Central Grants Programme – Enjoying Green Spaces & the Natural Environment Fund Analysis of Grants Awarded 2020/21 to 2024/25

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