

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE

Thursday, 17 July 2025

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Rooms - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 17 July 2025 at
10.00 am.

Present

Members:

Deputy Caroline Haines (Chair)
Deputy Benjamin Murphy (Deputy Chairman)
George Abrahams
Elizabeth Corrin
Alderman Vincent Keaveny, CBE
David Sales
Verderer Michael Chapman DL
Verderer Nicholas Munday

In attendance:

Jaspreet Hodgson (attended virtually)
Alderman Sir Nicholas Lyons (attended virtually)
Verderer Paul Morris (attended virtually)
James St John Davis (Ex-Officio) (attended virtually)

Officers:

Marguerite Jenkin	- 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
Jacqueline Eggleston	- Environment Department
Juliane Heinecke	- Environment Department
Jo Hurst	- Environment Department
Andrew Impey	- Environment Department
Laura Lawson	- Environment Department
Brian Pallett	- Environment Department
Geoff Sinclair	- Environment Department
Zoe Williams	- Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Verderer William Kennedy and Gregory Lawrence.

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

No declarations were received.

3. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That, the public minutes and non-public summary of the meeting held on 29 May 2025 be approved as an accurate record.

4. **APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AND GROUPS**

RESOLVED – That, Verderer Paul Morris be appointed as an observing Member of the Natural Environment Board.

5. **EPPING FOREST AND THE COMMONS GOVERNANCE PROPOSALS**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which proposed changes to the format of the meetings of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee along with the introduction of new member oversight groups.

The Chair introduced the report to the Committee. In response to a query regarding the time commitment Members would need to give to the oversight groups, the Chair responded that it would vary based on the group, explaining that a group such as the Epping Forest Act 150th Celebrations may be more intensive in the lead up to the anniversary. The Chair noted that the oversight groups were being set up to ensure that the various areas of operations across the Committee did not become siloed and improve responsiveness between Committee meetings.

A Member commented that a key output from the oversight groups should be to shape any policy that was considered by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee. The Chair noted that the role of groups such as the Epping Forest Act 150th Celebrations Oversight Group would have quite a specific focus but that this would vary across the groups.

Officers indicated that a Wanstead Parkland Plan steering group would be set up in due course. The Chair requested that Members interested in chairing this steering group contact Officers by email.

A Member asked what work was being done regarding the management of cows at Epping Forest. Officers responded that the Nature Resilience and Landscape Oversight Group would consider matters such as this. They noted that they expected the oversight group would consider the upcoming grazing management plan in detail. The Member also noted their interest in the financial and environmental opportunities available through the cows at Epping Forest. The Chair commented that these considerations could take place within the Nature Resilience and Landscape Oversight Group.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Approved the retention of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee (EF&CC) meetings on a bimonthly basis, holding six meetings each year, however, moving to four formal quarterly meetings for Committee business and decision making with two further meetings focused on

strategy and policy development held on site at Epping Forest and / or The Commons.

- Endorsed the principle of three Epping Forest and Commons Committee Saturday Visits annually, (March, July and November) on the Saturday preceding each Committee meeting that follows in the next week.
- Noted that the appointments to the proposed oversight groups were as follows:
 - a) Epping Forest Act 150th Celebrations Oversight Group:
 - Deputy Caroline Haines
 - Deputy Benjamin Murphy
 - Verderer Michael Chapman
 - Alderman Vincent Keaveny
 - Verderer Paul Morris
 - Verderer Nicholas Munday
 - b) Nature Resilience and Landscape Oversight Group (Epping Forest)
 - Deputy Caroline Haines
 - Deputy Benjamin Murphy
 - Verderer Paul Morris
 - Verderer Nicholas Munday
 - c) Engagement and Accessibility Oversight Group (Epping Forest)
 - Deputy Caroline Haines
 - Deputy Benjamin Murphy
 - Verderer Michael Chapman
 - Verderer Paul Morris
 - David Sales
 - d) Nature Resilience and Landscape Oversight Group (Burnham Beeches and the Commons):
 - Deputy Caroline Haines
 - Deputy Benjamin Murphy
 - Verderer Paul Morris

6. 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 the workplan.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the report and its contents.
- Noted the two planned briefing sessions for all interested Members on Biodiversity Net Gain potential at Natural Environment sites, and fundraising opportunities and resourcing for the Natural Environment Charities.

Burnham Beeches & The Commons

7. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (SUPERINTENDENT) BURNHAM BEECHES AND THE COMMONS UPDATE (APRIL - JUNE 2025)

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which presented key data for Burnham Beeches and the Commons for the period April 2025 – June 2025.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, extended their congratulations and gratitude to Geoff Sinclair, Assistant Director (Superintendent) of Burnham Beeches and the Commons, upon his retirement from the City Corporation. It was acknowledged that his contributions and leadership at Burnham Beeches and the Commons over the last few years, alongside his previous decade at Epping Forest, had been widely valued, and his knowledge and wisdom would be deeply missed.

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

8. **VETERAN TREE CONFERENCE UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update on the Veteran Tree Conference from Officers of the Environment Department.

The Chair thanked Officers, volunteers and Members for their contributions towards the success of the international conference on the biodiversity of pollarded trees. They noted that plans were being developed for 2026 to hold a digital symposium as a follow up to this conference.

A Member questioned whether there would be an opportunity for the City Corporation to sell consultancy services in this space, given its experience and leadership. The Chair assured the Member that they would consider this for future conferences. Officers agreed that there could be an opportunity to share the City Corporation's experience commercially. They noted there were other organisations that already used the facilities at Burnham Beeches to run workshops for the Veteran Tree Management Skills Certification. Another Member noted that the City Corporation should consider producing a centre of learning to encapsulate the knowledge that had been developed in this area.

With regard to the Assistant Director's report, the Deputy Chair requested that the outcomes of the nature surveys be reported to the Committee so they could understand the trends that arose from these. The Assistant Director commented that biodiversity was included in the golden threads to be developed and improved over the next three years. The Deputy Chair queried whether the Committee would receive a report on the outcomes from the veteran trees conference. The Assistant Director responded that a survey had been sent to the delegates that attended the conference, and there would be a report to summarise the feedback received.

In response to a comment from the Deputy Chair about the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) framework, the Assistant Director noted that it was disappointing the review of the Chilterns National Landscape boundary had been closed down. They noted the significance that Farthing Downs was still under review to become added to the Surrey Hills AONB, as it would be the first in London to become an AONB.

RESOLVED – That, Members noted the verbal update.

9. **RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE (BURNHAM BEECHES AND THE COMMONS)**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which provided an overview of the risk management processes in place, including risk governance and the format and frequency of reporting, for the Ashtead Common, Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common, Coulsdon and Other Commons, and West Wickham and Spring Park Charities.

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

10. **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITY REVIEW - ASSETS UPDATE FOR THE ASHTEAD COMMON CHARITY**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Natural Environment which summarised the processes used to audit the land assets held by the City Corporation as trustee of the Ashtead Common charity.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the audit process undertaken for the charity land assets of the Ashtead Common charity and the steps to maintain the Asset Register.
- Noted the charity land assets of the Ashtead Common charity included in the Appendix to the report.

11. **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITY REVIEW - ASSETS UPDATE FOR BURNHAM BEECHES AND STOKE COMMON CHARITY**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Natural Environment which summarised the processes used to audit the land assets held by the City Corporation as trustee of the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Charity.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the audit process undertaken for the charity land assets of the Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common charity and the steps to maintain the Asset Register.
- Noted the charity land assets of the Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common charity included in the Appendix to the report.

12. **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITY REVIEW - ASSETS UPDATE FOR THE COULSDON AND OTHER COMMONS CHARITY**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Natural Environment which summarised the processes used to audit the land assets held by the City Corporation as trustee of the Coulsdon and Other Commons Charity.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the audit process undertaken for the charity land assets of the Coulsdon and other Commons charity and the steps to maintain the Asset Register.
- Noted the charity land assets of the Coulsdon and other Commons charity included in the Appendix to the report.

13. **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITY REVIEW - CHARITY ASSETS UPDATE FOR THE WEST WICKHAM COMMON AND SPRING PARK WOOD CHARITY**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Natural Environment which summarised the processes used to audit the land assets held by the City Corporation as trustee of the West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood Charity.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the audit process undertaken for the charity land assets of the West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood charity and the steps to maintain the Asset Register.
- Noted the charity land assets of the West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood charity included in the Appendix to this report.

Epping Forest

14. **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SUPERINTENDENT'S EPPING FOREST UPDATE (MAY - JUNE 2025)**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which presented an update on business activity delivered in Epping Forest for the period of May to June 2025.

The Assistant Director noted the recent fire at Wanstead Flats. Officers and Members commended the London Fire Brigade and staff for their response.

A Member asked whether there was a policy for cutting paths as firebreaks for all the City Corporation's open spaces. The Assistant Director confirmed that while cutting regimes varied, there were fire management plans across Epping Forest. In response to a query, the Assistant Director also confirmed that staff were still able to do firebreak work during the nesting season.

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

15. **RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE (EPPING FOREST)**

The Committee received a report which provided an overview of the risk management processes in place, including risk governance and the format and frequency of reporting, for the Epping Forest Charity.

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

16. **MOTORGATE WAYLEAVE FEE INCREASE 2025**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which sought approval for the increase in wayleave fees for domestic motor access (motor gates) as of 1 October 2025.

A Member asked why the fees were being reviewed in line with Retail Price Index (RPI) rather than Consumer Price Index (CPI). They also expressed that they believed a 5-year review was too infrequent and suggested that they instead take place every couple of years. Officers confirmed they had previously heard feedback suggesting a more frequent review and they would take this into

account. They explained that they had followed an RPI approach as that was what had been recommended by the Chamberlain's department and what was used for fees and charges in January reporting. They confirmed they would ask for guidance about whether CPI would be more appropriate for the next increase.

Another Member requested that the Epping Forest Verderers be engaged in the future if there was local refusal to pay the increased fees that could result in enforcement action being taken or access removed. Officers confirmed that they would liaise with the Epping Forest Verderers as appropriate if there were instances where wayleaves may be stopped due to non-payments.

A Member queried what the administrative cost was to collect the wayleave fees. Officers assured the Member that the administration fees were built into all wayleave license applications to cover such costs, and letters were only sent electronically.

A Member noted that the 10-year delay in increasing the fees was regrettable and expressed hope that the process to increase the fees was automated and done more frequently in the future. Officers explained that the wayleave fees were collected by direct debit which were set up through the Chamberlain's department. They noted that the fees increase would generate enough income to cover administrative costs, and that the focus of the wayleaves was to ensure the Forest is protected.

RESOLVED – That, Members approved the increase wayleave fee for all domestic properties and agricultural accesses in line with Retail Price Index from April 2015 to April 2025.

17. PURCHASING OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE MACHINERY CHINGFORD GOLF COURSE

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which sought to update Members on the purchase for grounds maintenance machinery at Chingford Golf Course and proposed the purchase of an ex-demo 250E tees mower from John Deere.

A Member asked whether there was a programme for other machinery that would need to be replaced in the future. Officer responded that the depreciation of machinery and forward planning was an ongoing piece of work across the estate that would be picked up in detail through the charity review and grant settlement. In response to questions about procurement, Officers noted that they were required to complete a business plan for the transport oversight group before they spent money on vehicles and machinery.

The Member also asked whether John Deere was the supplier for all machinery at Epping Forest. Officers explained that they preferred to use local suppliers for machinery as it was faster to source necessary repairs and parts. They noted that John Deere was one of the suppliers within the locality. In response to a further query, they noted that they had considered leasing compared to buying to ensure best value. However, in this case there was the opportunity to purchase an ex-showroom model which proved the best value option. The Member also

queried whether the Golf Club would have the capability to maintain the mower in-house. Officers responded that there was an in-house machinery workshop at the Golf Course, and only a significant repair would require the mower to go back to the supplier.

Another Member cautioned that they did not want to over scrutinise the purchase as they required good equipment. They suggested that they would like to see a wider review to consider whether there needs to be more or better equipment to continue to perform services in the long term.

RESOLVED – That, Members approved the purchase of an ex-demo John Deere 2750E Tees mower at a cost of £21,000 from the Golf Course Machinery Renewal Fund.

18. ROOKERY WOOD RESERVOIR REMEDIAL WORKS

The Committee considered a Gateway 2: Project Proposal report which sought Member approval for a budget of £122,000 to reach the next Gateway.

Officers from the Environment Department expressed their support for the report but recommended that, at future gateways, consideration be given to including an option for the appointed contractor to investigate decommissioning the dam. They noted that this would ensure Members were fully informed of all available options. A Member commented that the project had been delayed for a long time, and they were eager to support the inclusion of this option to progress the project.

Another Member noted their support for including the additional option, noting that it was complementary land, a heritage landscape and part of the carbon sequestration project. They added that including the option to decommission the dam would allow the committee to consider the full range of opportunities available for the land. Members acknowledged that while they were supportive of the project, they believed the landscape issues needed to be considered as a vital part of it.

A Member queried whether the additional option would alter the projected cost figures. Officers responded that the cost of this option was likely to remain within the top range of the budget envelope, however the figures in the report were only estimates.

Officers explained that while the scope of the proposed project focussed on dam safety, they would be cognisant of potential mitigation or landscape improvement projects and would ensure the work would not be detrimental to such proposals. They noted that decommissioning the dam to ensure it would not be reformed naturally would require a large excavation that would have a significant impact on the earthworks.

Officers sought to assure Members that they would consider the landscape as a whole and ensure the final solution would deliver as many of the strategic priorities that were possible. Officers confirmed that any supplementary

proposals would be presented to the Committee in due course as part of the full assessment.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Approved budget of £122,000 for Gateway 2 to reach the next Gateway.
- Noted the total estimated cost of the project at £2,500,000 (excluding risk).

19. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITY REVIEW - CHARITY ASSETS UPDATE FOR THE EPPING FOREST CHARITY

The Committee received a report of the Director of Natural Environment which summarised the processes used to audit the land assets held by the City Corporation as Conservators of Epping Forest and trustee of the Epping Forest Charity.

In response to a question from a Member, Officers noted that in relation to the sites listed as complementary land in the appendix of the report, these were acquired by the City of London Corporation for use in relation to their protection or other support of Epping Forest. Decisions taken on the management of these sites must take into account the principles articulated in the buffer land policy as adopted in 1993, the Buffer Land Action Plan adopted in 1998, as well as particular site-specific considerations as appropriate. The Member noted that in relation to the legal implications section of the report, they had asked that these considerations and expectations with regard to the management of complementary land were identified.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- Noted the audit process undertaken for the charity land assets of the Epping Forest charity and the steps to maintain the Asset Register.
- Noted the charity land assets of the Epping Forest charity included in the Appendix to the report.

20. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE
No questions were raised in public session.

21. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

Regarding the recent fire at Wanstead Flats, the Chair commended the operational team for their excellent fire preparedness and response. They encouraged both Members and the public to continue raising awareness about the importance of exercising caution in the area. The Chair also emphasised the vital role the public can play in preventing future fires, particularly by ensuring litter was taken home.

22. 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.

23. **NON-PUBLIC MINUTES**

RESOLVED – That, Members approved the non-public minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2025 as an accurate record of proceedings.

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

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

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

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

Burnham Beeches & The Commons

26. **UPDATES ON BURNHAM BEECHES & THE COMMONS**

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

Epping Forest

27. **EPPING FOREST DEER MANAGEMENT UPDATE FOR 2024/25 SEASON AND 2025/26 ANNUAL DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN PROPOSALS REPORT**

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

28. **APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS BY THE RANGER**

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

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

One question was discussed in non-public session.

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

There was one item of any other business raised in non-public session.

The meeting ended at 12.32pm.

Chairman

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