

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BOARD**  
**Thursday, 23 October 2025**

Minutes of the meeting of the Natural Environment Board held at Committee Rooms  
- 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 23 October 2025 at 11.00 am

**Present**

**Members:**

James St John Davis (Chair)  
Charles Edward Lord, OBE JP (Deputy Chair)  
Deputy Caroline Haines  
Wendy Mead OBE  
Heather Barrett-Mold  
John Beyer (observer)  
Catherine Bickmore (observer)  
Tony Leach  
Dani Stephenson

**In attendance:**

Alderman Gregory Jones KC (ex-officio) – attended online  
Verderer Paul Morris (observer)  
Deputy Benjamin Murphy – attended online

**Officers:**

Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Marguerite Jenkin	- Chamberlain's Department
Jack Joslin	- City Bridge Foundation
Anna Cowperthwaite	- Comptroller and City Solicitor's Department
Joseph Smith	- Corporate Strategy & Performance
Katie Stewart	- Executive Director, Environment
Ben Bishop	- Environment Department
Emily Brennan	- Environment Department
Melanie Charalambous	- Environment Department
Ian Hughes	- Environment Department
Jo Hurst	- Environment Department
Andrew Impey	- Environment Department
Jake Tibbets	- Environment Department
Heinz Traut	- Environment Department
Zoe Williams	- Town Clerk's Department

The Chair welcomed the Committee and noted their thanks for the support of Officers and their work across the City Corporation's Open Spaces during the summer.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Deputy Anne Corbett, Vladislav Dobrokhoto, Karina Dostalova and William Upton KC.

The Chair noted that Karina Dostalova would be stepping down from the Natural Environment Board. The Committee noted their thanks and best wishes to the Member.

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 3 July 2025 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

4. **RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which sought to assure Members that the procedures in place within the Environment Department were satisfactory and that they met the requirements of the Corporate Risk Management Framework and, where applicable, the Charities Act 2011.

Regarding the risk about budget pressures and uncertainty over the future funding model, a Member noted that the effects of this risk should include reputational risk to the City Corporation if the transition was not handled well.

Another Member requested that Officers identify any tensions around the public and anti-social behaviour when the update on the Ponds was provided during item 11.

The Chair noted that it would be important to see an increased level of detail regarding risks such as work-related stress, impacts of anti-social behaviour and budgetary pressure, and a broader conversation would be started about how these risks should be mitigated.

**RESOLVED** – That, Members:

- a. considered and noted the content of the report, the Natural Environment Cross Divisional Risk Register, and the action being taken to effectively manage those risks
- b. considered and noted the content of the report, the City Gardens Risk Register and the action being taken to effectively manage those risks.

5. **CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update and presentation from Officers of the Environment Department about the leaky dam project at Epping Forest and the day held at Copped Hall.

The Chair asked about the total number of leaky dams to be installed and the timeline for the project. Officers responded that 374 leaky dams were to be

installed and for the more complex leaky dams, contractors would have until March 2027 to complete these. They explained that half of the project had been funded by the Climate Action Strategy, and it had also received a £200,000 grant from the Environment Agency, through the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. In response to a further query, Officers confirmed that construction of the various leaky dams would occur concurrently

Another Member noted that water resilience needed to be picked up as a cross-cutting theme on the Natural Environment Board as it would impact all of the City Corporation's open spaces.

With regards to outcomes of the leaky dam project, the Chair asked whether the 374 planned leaky dams would prepare the environment for the level of water resilience that would be required by the end of the project. Officers responded that leaky dams were the first step in improving the open spaces' water resilience and there was more that could be done in the future to hold more water back, such as overland flow interceptors and techniques. Officers estimated that the leaky dams would hold back approximately 10,000 cubic metres of water.

A Member queried how the presence of the leaky dams would be advertised to the public. Officers responded that they were working with the Communications Officers to finalise this. They noted that once the outline of the business case had been agreed with the Essex County Council, more publicity could be issued about the project.

## **Open Spaces**

### **6. REVENUE OUTTURN REPORT - 2024/25**

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which compared the revenue outturn for services overseen by the Natural Environment Board in 2024/25 with the final budget for the year.

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

### **7. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONAL FINANCE PROGRESS REPORT Q1 2025/26**

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which provided an update on the operational finance position for Quarter 1 for 2025/26 for the Natural Environment Division's (including City Gardens) revenue budget to date to the end of June 2025 and projected year-end outturn position, current live capital projects and outstanding debt position.

A Member requested further clarity about how the Grant Funding Model would operate with regards to the grant allocated for operational activity. Officers explained that the Grant Funding Model would be implemented in a phased approach, and the first phase was to transition the local risk budgets to the Grant Funding Model. Other areas of the budget would be moving to the Grant Funding Model in subsequent phases. The Member queried whether information could be

publicised about this. Officers confirmed they would update the public information document accordingly.

Another Member requested an update about the Monument. Officers responded that there had been ongoing conversations about how to achieve the transfer of responsibility within the City Corporation, and the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee had supported this transition. They explained that they would be meeting with Chamberlains to address the outstanding matter of the income generation. The Executive Director, Environment confirmed they would also be engaging with the Culture staff to ensure they have the appropriate resources to address this. The Chair noted that they would reinvigorate these discussions with the Chairman of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee.

In response to a query from the Chair, Officers confirmed that a lot of the debts identified in the report were in relation to historic wayleave debts, some of which were more than 10 years old.

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

**8. ENJOYING GREEN SPACES AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT – ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

The Committee received a report of the Interim Managing Director of City Bridge Foundation which provided an overview of projects funded through the EGS in the 2024/25 financial year and an analysis of the grants awarded by the EGS over the last five years.

Regarding the rejected EGS grant applications identified in the report, a Member asked about the reasoning for the rejection of the Good Gym's application. Officers responded that while it was a good application, the Good Gym had not made connections with staff about the feasibility of the work. They assured the Member that Officers provided comprehensive feedback with the rejection which the applicant could take on board if they were to reapply. In response to a further question about the application process, Officers responded that they ensured staff had pre-application calls with applicants, so they knew what was required during the process. They also directed them to relevant Officers managing the various Open Spaces so they could ensure the activity was possible in the area.

The Member also expressed concern that there were not any awards to activities in City Gardens and asked for the reasoning of this. Officers responded that the Natural Environment Board had previously decided not to fund City Garden related projects through this fund as this already had CIL funding.

A Member asked whether applicants were required to report the outcomes of the grant after it had been awarded. Officers confirmed the full grant management was included in the conditions of the grant, and at the end of each year they receive an impact report about the grant. They confirmed they would have a discussion with the organisation if it had not achieved what was intended.

The Chair asked whether the maximum impact in the short-term was the main outcome considered with ESG grants. Officers responded that they were constricted by the budget as they did not have the funding available to support long term impact projects. They further noted that they encouraged organisations to seek additional funding through other grant opportunities and with the outcomes of the Natural Environment Charity Review there may be opportunities in the future to support these groups with their long-term endeavours.

**RESOLVED – That, Members:**

- a. Noted the allocation of grants for 2024-25 approved under delegated authority, as shown in appendix 2 of the report.
- b. Noted the key findings of the analysis of EGS funding programme over the last five years 2020/21 to 2024/25, as shown in appendix 3 of the report.

**9. COOL STREETS AND GREENING – PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which provided an update on the delivery of the Cool Streets and Greening programme.

Members noted the positive feedback they had received about the transformation of the small spaces in the city.

**RESOLVED – That, Members:**

- a. Noted the content of the programme update.
- b. Noted the extension of the Cool Streets and Greening programme timeframes by 12 months to March 2027, as agreed by the CAS Square Mile Programme Board.
- c. Noted the additional projects being proposed to be delivered in Phase Five through the relevant gateway approval processes, detailed in Appendix 3 of the report.

**10. MOORGATE CROSSRAIL STATION LINKS: FINSBURY CIRCUS WESTERN ARM**

The Committee received a Gateway 6: Outcome report of the Director of the Built Environment about the Finsbury Circus Western Arm relandscaping scheme.

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

**11. PONDS - VERBAL UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update from Officers of the Environment Department about the Hampstead Heath Ponds.

Officers noted that they had been receiving a strong response to the consultation on the Hampstead Heath Ponds, and that negative commentary about the City Corporation had declined. They also explained that focus groups would be conducted as part of the consultation to collect qualitative information. Officers further noted that given the strong response rates, it was unlikely that a final report would be delivered before the end of the year.

The Chair noted that setting realistic expectations for the timeline would be essential and establishing the decision-making framework would be equally important. A Member, also the Chairman of the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee, emphasised that while the consultation was about the Hampstead Heath Ponds, it concerned broader issues likely to be of relevance to City Corporation policy.

## **12. CITY GARDENS TREE ANNUAL UPDATE**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which provided an update on the state of the City's Urban Forest, to give Members a clear understanding of the health, condition and management of the trees by the City of London Corporation within the square mile and the aims and objectives for the next year.

The Chair requested that the Committee receive a breakdown of all the trees that were not in good health and a realistic outline of what could be done.

In response to a query, Officers confirmed that while the report only outlined those trees owned and managed by the City Corporation, they had an influence on how private trees were looked after and they had the opportunity to comment on all planning applications that involved trees.

The Chair noted that comments had been raised about the protection of the City Corporation's ancient and heritage trees, as the sponsorship of these trees could be a beneficial way to contribute to an Urban Tree Fund. Officers responded that they were in the early stages of considering options for the Urban Tree Fund and agreed that the fund should consider the protection and development of the urban forest. In response to a question about how the Urban Tree Fund would be set up, Officers responded that such matters were still to be considered and would be addressed in a report that was expected to come to the Board in the following year.

A Member asked whether the information about City Corporation's ancient trees could be further publicised. Another Member, also the Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, responded that a large amount of publicity had been produced from the International Conference on the Biodiversity of Veteran Trees recently held at Burnham Beeches. They explained that this was because Epping Forest had the greatest concentration of ancient trees.

A Member queried whether the City Corporation had any control over the biosecurity of privately owned trees. Officers responded that national biosecurity controlled any plant imports brought into the United Kingdom. They noted that they were reviewing standard planning conditions as part of the Service Level Agreement with the planning department and they would consider biosecurity as part of this.

A Member asked whether, given the limited space within the City of London for tree planting, alternative approaches to introducing greenery in urban areas had been considered. Officers confirmed that such options were being explored,

including alternative planting methods on Leadenhall Street. They also noted that vertical planting at St Dunstan in the East would be renewed this year.

A Member asked whether Officers were satisfied with the current system for monitoring compliance with planning conditions, particularly requiring private companies to replant trees that had failed. Officers explained that the Service Level Agreement with the Planning and Development Department addressed the monitoring of all trees planted within the City of London. They confirmed that this monitoring was carried out by their team, with findings reported back to Planning and Development.

Officers assured the Member that any trees known to have failed during planning permission periods had been replanted. In response to a further query, Officers noted that Planning and Development had not previously employed an arboriculture specialist and had relied on tree failures being reported to Planning Officers. The Member requested that a formal mechanism be established to inform the Committee when a tree failure occurred and remedial action had been taken.

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

**13. CITY GARDENS UPDATE**

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

Officers announced that at the London in Bloom awards, City Gardens received gold and won best in category for Town of the Year, West Ham Park and Golders Hill Park received gold for Large Park of the Year over 25 acres, Hill Garden received gold for Small Park of the Year up to 5 acres, the Hill Garden Pergola received gold and won best in category for Walled Garden of the Year, and Queen's Park received gold and won best in category for Large Park of the Year over 25 acres.

The Chair noted these achievements and congratulated Officers on the awards and positive feedback they had received about the City Gardens.

A Member asked whether there was any data available on the increased use of the new green spaces within the City of London. The Chair commented that they had found the presence of the spaces on social media a useful indication of their use. Officers responded that they had considered gathering usage statistics and confirmed mobile tracking would be a useful way of collecting this data. They noted that would speak to Planning and Development to further consider this.

Regarding the opening of Jubilee Gardens, the Member also asked Officers whether further consideration had been given as to how to story of Houndsditch could be better reflected. Officers responded that they would speak to the Policy and Projects Department to consider what could be done to retell this story.

The Member also raised the matter of homelessness in the gardens at St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate. The noted the complexity between the roles and responsibilities between City Gardens, City of London Police, and the Community Action team when responding to this, and explained that it had taken several months to get to stage where they could address it. The Chair noted they had discussed with Officers how the response to these matters worked in practice compared to formal processes. Officers confirmed that the tents in the garden had since been removed. They assured Members that they were collaborating with the relevant departments on this issue and were working on developing a framework to establish the responsibilities of each team for such matters.

14. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**  
There were no questions on matters relating to the work of the Committee.

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

Sport activities at the City Corporation's Open Spaces

As the City Corporation's lead Member for sport, the Deputy Chair noted that the sporting activity taking place on various City Corporation open spaces was only reported to the committees responsible for the space and there was no central repository for this work.

The Deputy Chair requested that a report be presented to the Natural Environment Board, and sent to the Sports Sounding Board, detailing the sporting activity being conducted in and around the open spaces. Officers confirmed that a report would be presented on this matter.

Walk in the Park

A Member explained that they had been speaking with the Royal Voluntary Service about a concept called 'Walk in the Park' which aimed to create both virtual and in-person walks for local communities. They suggested that this could be a good initiative to roll out in the City Corporation's open spaces. Officers confirmed that the superintendents would discuss this in an upcoming meeting and respond to the Member in due course.

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 Thursday 3 July 2025 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.
18. **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OUTSTANDING DEBT ARREARS - 30 JUNE 2025**  
The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment.
19. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**  
One question on matters relating to the work of the Committee was raised.



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

There was no other urgent business to be raised in non-public.

**The meeting ended at 12.33pm.**

-----  
Chairman

**Contact Officer: Zoe Williams**  
**Zoe.Williams@cityoflondon.gov.uk**