

EPPING FOREST & COMMONS COMMITTEE

Thursday, 27 November 2025

Minutes of the meeting of the Epping Forest & Commons Committee held at
Committee Rooms - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Thursday, 27 November
2025 at 10.00 am

Present

Members:

Deputy Caroline Haines (Chair)
George Abrahams
Elizabeth Corrin
Alderman Vincent Keaveny CBE
Charles Edward Lord, OBE JP (Ex-Officio Member)
Alderman Sir Nicholas Lyons
David Sales
Philip Woodhouse
Verderer William Kennedy
Verderer Nicholas Munday

In attendance:

Deputy Benjamin Murphy (Deputy Chair) (attended virtually)
Verderer Michael Chapman (attended virtually)
Deputy Jaspreet Hodgson (attended virtually)
Verderer Paul Morris (attended virtually)
James St John Davis (Ex-Officio Member) (attended virtually)

Officers:

Clem Harcourt	- Chamberlain's Department
Marguerite Jenkin	- Chamberlain's Department
Anna Cowperthwaite	- Comptroller & 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
Tom Hoyle	- Environment Department
Jo Hurst	- Environment Department
Joanne Hill	- Environment Department
Andrew Impey	- Environment Department
Laura Lawson	- Environment Department
Heinz Traut	- Environment Department
Tristan Vetta	- Environment Department
Zoe Williams	- Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies received.

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 17 July 2025 be approved as an accurate record.

Matters arising

The Chair noted that it was still possible for Members to join oversight groups and encouraged Members to contact them if they were interested.

4. **CARBON REMOVALS UPDATE**

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

The Chair queried when the data from the presentation would be included in carbon reporting. Officers responded that they expected this to be included in the middle of 2026. The Chair noted that Carbon Action should be reported within a Landscape Resilience context in the future.

The Deputy Chair noted the need to define success criteria for the work on the leaky dams and asked that the Officer respond in due course to confirm what this would look like and the expected delivery timeline. They commented that this would enable progress to be monitored effectively.

A Member noted that it would be important to clearly communicate the works to external stakeholders and residents, so they were aware of what they were and why they were taking place. A Member suggested that information about this work could be displayed on the Livery website, as it was the type of project that the community might wish to make charitable donations towards. Officers responded they would contact the Member about arranging this.

Another Member queried whether the work could extend to existing ponds and waterbodies. Officers responded that some restoration of existing ponds was included in the Pondscape project. They noted that pond restoration works had been undertaken at Fairmead, Cuckoo Brook and True Loves Pond, with more sites being introduced in the upcoming year. Officers explained that as part of the wider ponds strategy they would be reviewing each of the ponds, looking at data for records of protected species and habitat management required. They noted that aspects of this review would include working alongside the leaky dams project.

A Member noted that at the recent visit to Copped Hall, they had raised that nearby resident's basements and cellars had been subject to flooding due to the underground water table in the area. They queried whether it would be possible for water to be extracted from this and be put towards maintaining the health of

some of the ancient trees. The Chair noted that this had been raised in previous meetings and would be addressed in due course.

Burnham Beeches & The Commons

5. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (SUPERINTENDENT) BURNHAM BEECHES AND THE COMMONS UPDATE (JULY TO OCTOBER)

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director, Environment which presented key data for Burnham Beeches and the Commons for the period of July to October 2025.

The Deputy Chair requested that in future Officers ensure there was a measurable output against items in the business plan so the Committee could be satisfied that resource allocation was having the desired impact. Officers agreed that it would be helpful to see a quantifiable impact in these reports and noted they would pass the feedback on to the Head Rangers.

The Member also requested that Members were invited to all events happening in the Commons where it was appropriate. The Chair reminded Members that they were welcome to attend any community events being held at the Commons or Epping Forest and encouraged Members to inform Officers if there was an event they wanted to attend.

The Deputy Chair noted that they had spoken to Officers prior to the meeting about whether consideration should be given to the ongoing issues with Natural England providing SSSI assessments and escalating this. Officers responded that while the relationship with Natural England varied between regions, the current relationship in this area was challenging. They noted they had recently escalated an issue with Natural England regarding the Special Area of Conservation and managing neighbouring land. They assured the Deputy Chair that they were holding them to account. They also agreed that if money was spent by the City Corporation that should be from Natural England, then that should be challenged.

Regarding Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO), the Deputy Chair also discussed with Officers what the policy guidance was for when these would be applicable. Officers noted that there was guidance for how PSPO were applied and Officers follow this intently. They provided an example that members of the public received three warnings for having a dog off lead before they would receive a fine and this was recorded on a private spreadsheet.

RESOLVED – That, Members noted the report and its contents

6. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE - BURNHAM BEECHES AND THE COMMONS

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which sought to provide assurance that risk management procedures in place within the Environment Department and its Natural Environment Division were satisfactory and met the requirements of the Corporate Risk Management Framework and the Charities Act 2011.

A Member sought clarification on whether the original position would be the inherent risk and the current position would be residual risk. Officers confirmed that these were the correct equivalents, they acknowledged that this was not clear and assured the Member that they were liaising with Corporate Risk Management to determine how this could be made clear and display how risks had changed over time.

The Deputy Chair noted that it would be useful for the report to have a risk appetite statement to reflect what the risk appetite of the Charity was and assess whether the risks were within this.

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

7. REVENUE OUTTURN 2024/25 - BURNHAM BEECHES AND THE COMMONS

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which compared the revenue outturn for the various Commons charities in 2024/25 with the final budget for the year.

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

8. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2026/27 - BURNHAM BEECHES AND THE COMMONS

The Committee considered a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which sought approval for the revenue and capital budgets for each of the individual Commons charities for 2026/27, for subsequent submission to Finance Committee.

The Chair requested an explanation as to why there was reference to decreases at West Wickham Common and Spring Park, Coulsdon and other Commons. They also noted that they had received questions as to the inconsistencies with Ashted Common not taking card payments while West Wickham could, as well as the benches.

Officers acknowledged that there had been a change in the style of the report as the Charity began to transition to a Grant Funding Model in order to reflect charity-style reporting. They provided an explanation on what the various elements of the report entailed, noting that the Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA) was modelled based on information and data from the budget process used by the Natural Environment Senior Leadership team for decision making. They noted that the SOFA separated grant income from self-generated income which was not previously reflected in local risk reporting. They also highlighted that they had introduced a separation between restricted and unrestricted spend, which was important for charity reporting.

Officers noted a correction that on page 93, table 1 of the report, Total Grant Funding for Burnham Beeches was £1.278 million for 2025/26 Original Budget, £1.413 million for 2025/26 Latest Total Budget and £2.120 million for 2026/27 Budget. They further noted that on table 6, page 98 and appendix 3 of the report,

total local risk expenditure for West Wickham and Coulsdon Commons was £951,000 for 2026/27 which would result in an overall breakeven position.

Officers responded to questions about reduced budgets for 2026/27 in some Commons charities, noting that the decreases in Ashted and West Wickham Commons were because the 2025/26 budget included one-off funding for the Cyclical Work Programme backlog. The Deputy Chair commented that it was unclear whether these reductions were due to projects being cancelled or delivered through the local risk budget. Another Member agreed with this statement, noting that the sums involved in the adjustments were quite significant in the context of these charities. They commented that more clarity in any anticipated CWP adjustments would be useful.

Noting reference to a contingency fund in the report, a Member queried what this was and why it was identified as a contingency fund. Officers responded that this reflected funding from Finance Committee contingencies in 2025/26 to offset additional costs arising from the staff pay award that year. They explained that this was reflected in the direct employee cost in the SOFA. The Deputy Chair observed that the Natural Environment Director's local risk budget effectively functioned as a contingency fund, intended to cover unforeseen and urgent costs. They highlighted that this was an example of unclear terminology and expressed a preference for adopting more standard financial naming conventions through the Natural Environment Charities Review (NECR).

A Member noted that the Committee should receive a form of more regular reporting in the format that a board would usually receive to keep updated on the Charity's performance. The Executive Director, Environment noted that as part of the NECR they were considering how such reporting could be conducted in a more commercial manner. The Chair noted that this discussion would come back to the Committee at a later stage.

The Chair proposed that the budget be approved in order to align with the required approval process timings, noting support for the further work required to make a case for a reset of the baseline grant, and to improve clarity on the detail of CWP spend. Officers noted that there was a major piece of work outstanding to review the sufficiency of baselines of the budgets and there may be an opportunity to ask for additional funding within the 2026/27 or 2027/28 budget envelope. They explained they had been given the opportunity to summarise the re-baselined budgets at an upcoming Finance Committee meeting.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- i. Approved the proposed draft revenue budget for 2026/27 for Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common charity for submission for approval by the Finance Committee
- ii. Approved the proposed draft revenue budget for 2026/27 for West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood and Coulsdon and Other Commons charities for submission for approval by the Finance Committee
- iii. Approved the proposed revenue budget for 2026/27 for Ashted Common charity for submission for approval by the Finance Committee

- iv. Approved capital and supplementary revenue project budgets for The Commons for 2026/27 for submission for approval by the Finance Committee.
- v. Authorised the Chamberlain, in consultation with the Executive Director, Environment to approve amendments for 2025/26 and 2026/27 budgets arising from changes to recharges & support services or for any further implications arising from corporate contracts, energy price increases, changes to the Cyclical Works Programme (CWP) and depreciation during budget setting.

9. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 - BURNHAM BEECHES AND STOKE COMMON

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which presented a draft version of the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2025 for Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common.

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

10. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 - ASHTEAD COMMON

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which presented a draft version of the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2025 for Ashtead Common.

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

11. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 - WEST WICKHAM COMMON AND SPRING PARK WOOD AND COULSDON AND OTHER COMMONS

The Committee received a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which presented a draft version of the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2025 for West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood and Coulsdon and Other Commons.

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

Epping Forest

12. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SUPERINTENDENT'S EPPING FOREST UPDATE JULY TO SEPTEMBER

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

Regarding work that had taken place at Copped Hall, a Member asked whether a distinction was made when resource was being used on complementary land compared to being used within the Charity. Officers responded that they had been working on quantifying the work carried out on complementary land as opposed to the Charity. They noted they were awaiting the complementary land

policy to detail this. The Chair noted that Officers were conscious this distinction was required, and this was being worked on.

The Deputy Chair queried whether more consideration should be given to the Fire Brigade's ability to access the more difficult areas of the forest. Officers advised that, following a summer debrief on the fires that had occurred, they had reviewed hotspot mapping and tested existing measures. They were satisfied that appropriate arrangements were in place but agreed to take this query away for further consideration. It was noted that fires in wooded areas were attended by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, and measures had been introduced to improve accessibility, such as numbering gates to assist in directing crews to the exact location of incidents.

Regarding the Boat House fire at Higham's Park, a Member asked whether insurance cover was available. Officers confirmed the insurance would only cover demolition costs as the building was dilapidated. The Member also asked whether any benefits could be drawn from fires in the Natural environment such as ecological surveys and nature restoration. Officers responded that while there were not benefits to nature the fires did allow Officers to pick up any litter underneath the grass. The Chair noted that fire prevention was the key element and the best route was always to try and stop any fires from spreading.

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

13. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE - EPPING FOREST

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which sought to provide assurance that risk management procedures in place within the Environment Department and its Natural Environment Division were satisfactory and meet the requirements of the Corporate Risk Management Framework and the Charities Act 2011.

The Chair noted that the feedback raised in item 6, regarding clarity in terminology and the provision of a risk appetite statement would apply to this report.

RESOLVED – That, Members confirmed, on behalf of the City Corporation as trustee, that the register appended to the report satisfactorily set out the key risks to the charity and that appropriate systems were in place to identify and mitigate risk.

14. EPPING FOREST CONSTABLES AND AUTHORISED OFFICERS

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which provided an overview of the roles and responsibilities of Constables and Authorised Officers at Epping Forest and proposed updating the existing delegations contained in the Court of Common Council's Officer Scheme of Delegations for the City of London Corporation specifically regarding appointment and functions of Constables and Authorised Officers. It also sought authority to extend such roles in respect of fly-tipping.

The Chair noted that prior to the meeting, Members had been sent an updated list of recommendations, following feedback on the clarity of the report. Members

had also received an updated version of appendix 2 of the report which displayed the proposed amendments to the Officer Scheme of Delegation as tracked changes.

A Member noted that while the Verderers were supportive of the practical expectations of the report, they were concerned that the recommendations would complicate a simple process. They believed that the chain of command should remain unchanged where the Superintendent was attested by a Justice of the Peace and appointed the enforcement team. They noted that the Verderers did not support involving the wider City Corporation, other charities, or other committees in this decision-making process and favoured keeping responsibility solely with the Superintendent.

Officers explained that the recommendation referred to by the Member concerned the acceptance of certain local waste authority related powers from Epping Forest District Council, rather than the appointment of Constables. They added that the recommendation to delegate authority to the Town Clerk (in respect of potentially accepting local waste authority powers from other relevant authorities in the area) followed standard practice when entering into agreements with external bodies.

With regard to the proposal to delegate the authority to appoint Constables for attestation, Officers explained that this delegation already existed in the Scheme of Delegations but would benefit from updating. As the Officer Scheme of Delegations is a core governance document of the City Corporation covering more than just the Epping Forest Charity/Conservator functions, final decisions relating to its content rests with the Court of Common Council. The report was therefore asking the Committee, in its capacity as Conservators and Trustee of the Epping Forest Charity, to endorse the proposed amendments to this document as they relate to the delegations relevant to Epping Forest.

They further noted that the delegations contained within the Scheme were exercisable by the Executive Director, Environment, the Director of Natural Environment, and the Superintendent, ensuring appropriate oversight and cover in the event of absence. In practice, although all three roles held this authority, it was typically the Superintendent who exercised the delegation.

The Chair queried what changes were likely to be made to the Scheme of Delegations as a result of the Natural Environment Charity Review. Officers explained that, as far as they were aware, there was no additional impact. They noted the Committee was responsible for considering the delegations in the Officer Scheme of Delegations as they related to the functions of the Conservators, and endorsing them to the Court of Common Council.

The Chair noted that although the recommendations sought to formalise existing practice, they recognised that some Members were concerned about how the Verderers and the Committee would fit into the decision-making process should the recommendations be approved.

A Member noted that while they had appreciated the information that had been provided and additional input from Officers, they did not agree with the recommendations of the report and believed further work, such as that of the Natural Environment Charity Review, needed to be completed before it progressed further. They expressed concern that the recommendations could result in many decisions being made outside of the Committee, without input from the Verderers.

In response to a query about what needed to be approved in the meeting to continue operations, Officers responded that Appendix 3 needed to be approved in order to appoint Constables.

A Member queried whether the Committee would be exposing itself to legal risk where Constables had powers to stop and detain persons, potentially putting them in harm's way. They further asked how the Charity, the Committee and Members would be protected from this. Officers responded that appropriate training was provided to Constables on this topic and there were very experienced trained staff that would be put in the position of Constable, many of whom come from a Police background. Officers confirmed that the Charity was meeting its obligations in training Constables for such scenarios.

A Member noted that they believed the options the Committee had in this decision was either to adopt the City Corporations standard delegation of authority process or a delegation process which was specific to Epping Forest.

The Deputy Chair noted that while he understood the frustration with the process and understood the Member's suggestion to delegate authority to just the Superintendent, this created a single point of dependency. They noted that if something were to happen to the Superintendent, there needed to be an appropriate chain of command and sufficient operational resilience to ensure decisions could still be taken in exceptional circumstances. They suggested that it would be useful for the Director to receive the same training as the Superintendent on particular matters so there was the ability to provide oversight if such a circumstance arose. The Deputy Chair further noted that the Superintendent had agreed to develop procedural guidance to explain how this process would work and this could provide Members with assurance.

The Deputy Chair added that it was important to distinguish this issue from the broader governance questions being raised. They noted that as part of the wider governance review of the Natural Environment Charities, there needed to be clarity on which powers under the Epping Forest Act were delegated specifically to the Epping Forest Committee and therefore could not be further delegated without the Committee's agreement, and which matters sat elsewhere within the City Corporation.

Officers suggested that based on the feedback from Members, the Committee proceeded with approving the uncontested recommendations and consider at a later date the recommendations that referred to delegations being exercised by the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair. They noted that

the City of London Corporation acting by the Court of Common Council was the legal Conservator of Epping Forest under the Epping Forest Act, and it was appropriate that the Court of Common Council retained appropriate oversight of these functions through the Corporation's corporate governance framework. They added that delegations were necessary for good order and efficiency, provided that the relevant committees maintained appropriate oversight. They sought to assure Members that nothing proposed in the report would remove or diminish the oversight or exercise of the Conservative functions by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee.

The Chair accordingly moved an amendment to the recommendations in the report with the effect of postponing decisions to delegate authority to approve future authorisations of Epping Forest Keepers and amend the Scheme of Delegations, while allowing Officers at Epping Forest to move forward with the necessary authorisations of Epping Forest Keepers, Authorised Officers and Constables:

- A. i) Approve the authorisation of Epping Forest Keepers and Constables as suitable persons by Epping Forest District Council under Section 108 of the Environment Act 1995 as set out in paragraphs 5 and 6 of this report; and (ii) ~~delegate authority to the Town Clerk, after consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee, to approve any future similar authorisations by other local waste collection authorities for the areas in which Epping Forest is situated.~~
- C. ~~Endorse the proposed revisions to the delegations in the Epping Forest section of the Scheme of Delegations to Officers as set out in Appendix 2 and paragraph 9 of this report (authorising the Executive Director Environment, the Director Natural Environment and the Superintendent (Epping Forest) to exercise those functions set out in Appendix 2).~~
- D. ~~Delegate authority to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Epping Forest and Commons Committee to agree a final revised version of the Epping Forest section of the Scheme of Delegations to Officers for submission to the City Corporation's Policy and Resources Committee and subsequently to the Court of Common Council.~~
- G. Approved the authorisation of the posts set out in Appendix 3 of the report for attestation as Constables and as Authorised Officers.

Discussing the amendment, a Member noted that they did not agree with the approval of the amended recommendations as they believed the Committee needed to retain complete oversight and scrutiny of such powers.

Concluding the debate, the Chair welcomed support for their amendment, noting that it would allow Officers to proceed with necessary work to progress the authorisation of Epping Forest Keepers and Constables.

Members, by majority, supported the amendment.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- a. Approved the authorisation of Epping Forest Keepers and Constables as suitable persons by Epping Forest District Council under Section 108 of the Environment Act 1995 as set out in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the report.
- b. Authorised the completion of a Memorandum of Understanding with Epping Forest District Council in respect of recommendation a, including the provision of an Indemnity to EFDC (and any similar MoU's with other local waste collection authorities for the areas in which Epping Forest is situated).
- c. Approved arrangements being entered into with Essex Police and the Metropolitan Police under Part 4 and Schedule 5 of the Police Reform Act 2002 for certain powers available to police constables to be conferred on the Epping Forest Regulatory Officer and Enforcement Officers as set out in paragraph 7 of the report.
- d. Noted that it was proposed an Epping Forest Authorised Officer, Constable and Enforcement Monitoring Report be placed before the Committee annually.
- e. Approved the authorisation of the posts set out in Appendix 3 of the report for attestation as Constables and as Authorised Officers.

15. EPPING FOREST CARE AND MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment which sought authorisation to manage care and maintenance arrangements under which local councils maintained parts of Epping Forest on behalf of the Conservators and sought approval of a Care & Maintenance Agreements (C&M) Operational Protocol which would guide the management of the relevant care and maintenance arrangements.

At 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.

Officers clarified that the care and maintenance arrangements permitted third parties in the form of local authorities and parish councils to manage forest land as appropriate. They noted that the arrangements provided recreational open space and, if they did not exist, the Conservators would not likely manage the space in the same manner (but more inline with the Conservator's more general practices on the Forest). They noted that Local Councils were not charged to manage forest land in this way, nor did the Conservators pay the respective councils to manage the land.

In response to a Member's query seeking clarity on the indemnity arrangements, Officers explained that indemnity and insurance was a must-have in these arrangements and part of the reason for the report was to ensure there were up to date arrangements in place.

With regard to the indemnity arrangements, a Member asked for clarification on which parties would be held harmless for the services provided. Officers

explained that the indemnity applied in situations where a local council carried out actions on Epping Forest land, and its purpose was to ensure that the City Corporation was protected from any liabilities arising from those actions.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- a. Agreed and adopted the C&M Agreement Operational Protocol in principle and authorised the Superintendent to make minor amendments consistent with the agreed principles from time to time.
- b. Authorised the Superintendent to negotiate amendments to existing C&M agreements where appropriate to ensure they were consistent with the approach in the C&M Agreement Operational Protocol, and, where appropriate amendments can be agreed, to make such amendments to the C&M agreements (subject to extensions to existing C&M sites being reserved to your Committee).
- c. Authorised the Superintendent to enter into new written C&M agreements in respect of those areas currently subject to verbal arrangements (subject to the written terms being consistent with the C&M Agreement Operational Protocol).
- d. Authorised the Superintendent to terminate arrangements where it is not possible to agree amendments or new agreements to ensure the arrangements were consistent with the C&M Agreement Operational Protocol, or where care and maintenance standards were not consistent with the C&M Agreement Operational Protocol.

16. REVENUE OUTTURN 2024/25 - EPPING FOREST

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

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

17. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2026/27 - EPPING FOREST

The Committee considered a report of the Chamberlain and Executive Director, Environment which sought approval for the revenue and capital budgets for Epping Forest charity for 2026/27, for subsequent submission to Finance Committee.

The Chair noted that the principle of the concerns raised in the discussion on item 8 would apply to this report and commented that the historical underfunding of core operations made it impossible for the Superintendent to work within the local risk budget.

Officers confirmed that there were sufficient reserves to make the £162,000 transfer projected from the charity's unrestricted reserves in the budget. They noted they were working to produce a report on reserves and reserves policy in the future, which would be addressed in the discussion on the Grant Funding Model.

Officers further explained that a paper would be considered by Finance Committee in January 2026 regarding proposals to meet the projected shortfall. They noted that this report would be clear about the impact of not having sufficient funding for the budget. They assured Members that they would provide the Committee with an update on this process in the following meeting.

The Deputy Chair noted that the recent data work had highlighted areas requiring improvement, which aligned with the Natural Environment Charity Review, and that the assets requiring funding were consistent with the strategic deliverables. They commented that, while further work was required on how the budget was allocated, drawing on reserves was not appropriate at this stage ahead of transitioning to the Grant Funding Model. Instead, any associated risks should be managed through the established Finance Committee processes.

The Chair emphasised that the role of the Committee was to reflect the level of operational concern on the ground and the key concern was the level of the budget moving forward, given that they had been advised as Charity Trustees by the Superintendent that this was not sufficient to cover contingency in the future such as the replacement of the vehicle fleet. The Chair noted that, given these concerns, they could not knowingly direct the Committee to support the insufficient budget levels moving forward.

A Member noted their discomfort in approving a budget with a shortfall when the Committee had the ability to negotiate this further. They suggested that further scrutiny should be given to the level of the shortfall.

Another Member expressed concern that the Charity's reserves were very limited for an organisation of its size and were already being drawn down to meet the shortfall. They emphasised that this was not sustainable and would need to be addressed going forward.

The Chair noted that, although the budget should be approved to align with required approval process timings, further work was required to make a case for a reset of the baseline grant and the Committee wished to strongly express its concern about the risks associated with operating under such a constrained budget and using Charity reserves to achieve breakeven. They also highlighted that the 2027/28 budget might not be approved the following year if the Committee was not satisfied that sufficient progress had been made.

RESOLVED – That, Members:

- a. Noted the latest revenue budget for Epping Forest charity for 2025/26;
- b. Approved the proposed draft revenue budget for 2026/27 for Epping Forest charity for submission for approval by the Finance Committee;
- c. Approved capital and supplementary revenue project budgets for Epping Forest for 2026/27 for submission for approval by the Finance Committee;
- d. Authorised the Chamberlain, in consultation with the Executive Director, Environment to approve amendments for 2025/26 and 2026/27 budgets arising from changes to recharges & support services or for any further implications arising from corporate contracts, energy price increases,

changes to the Cyclical Works Programme (CWP) and depreciation during budget setting.

18. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 - EPPING FOREST

The Committee received a report which presented a draft version of the Trustee's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2025 for Epping Forest.

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

19. COMMITTEE DIARY AND UPCOMING EVENTS

The Committee received the Epping Forest and Commons Committee Diary and upcoming events.

20. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

There were no questions received.

21. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

Officers noted that questions had been received around Avian Flu outbreak and assured Members that all of the necessary policy and procedure around the outbreak was in place and had been updated and reviewed. They also noted that the new staff had been trained in appropriate actions to take and signage had been prepared.

The Committee wished to record its thanks to Angela Cater who was leaving the City Corporation.

The Chair noted the success of the Tree Amble podcast and passed on congratulations to those who contributed to it.

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 Page 15 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 17 July 2025 as an accurate record of proceedings.

Matters arising

One matter was raised.

24. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CHARITIES REVIEW – GRANT FUNDING MODEL PRINCIPLES PROPOSAL

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

Burnham Beeches & The Commons

25. UPDATES ON BURNHAM BEECHES & THE COMMONS

There were no further updates discussed.

Epping Forest

26. UPDATES ON EPPING FOREST

One matter was discussed.

27. ENTERING OF PROPERTY AGREEMENT

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

28. REQUEST FOR THE PROVISION OF A DEED OF GRANT EASEMENT

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

29. REPORT OF ACTION TAKEN

The Committee received a report of the Town Clerk.

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

There were no questions raised in non-public session.

31. 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 12.48pm.

Chairman

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