

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Open Spaces and City Gardens	20 April 2015
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Public</b>
Annual Committee Visit to City Gardens	
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>For Decision</b>
Director of Open Spaces	
<b>Summary</b>	
<p>This report proposes a change to the annual committee visit to City Gardens' sites, instead moving to a model where informal visits would take place by exception, where a major issue or improvement had occurred that Members may not have encountered through another committee or event.</p>	
<p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree that the annual visit to sites within the City Gardens Section be discontinued in its current form, and that future visits are arranged by exception.</li> </ul>	

### **Main Report**

#### **Background**

1. Under the former Trees, Gardens and City Open Spaces Sub-Committee, site visits used to take place immediately prior to a meeting on an as-needs basis, i.e. when it was helpful for Members to be aware of a particular site issue or improvement. These site visits could therefore potentially take place several times per year.
2. Under the current governance model, it was agreed that a more formal, annual visit should be made to the City Gardens Section, in the same way that visits take place to other sites within the department.

#### **Current Position**

3. The opportunity to show Members the work of the City Gardens team, and to be able to address Members' questions on site is welcomed. However attendance at the visits has dwindled markedly in recent years. Possible reasons for this are suggested below.
4. Put simply, there is much less to see in this small, but strategically important part of the department. Members are much more familiar with the sites due to

their central location near to Guildhall, and Members own personal interest in the sites through their Ward duties.

5. Up to ten years ago, site improvements were generally achieved through the City team working closely with other officers across the City Corporation to create additional planting and enhancements to gardens and highways sites. An annual visit was a practical way of showing Members what had been achieved within the last year. With the creation of the Environmental Enhancement team and the increased amount of Section 106 funding, an increasing number of projects started to be delivered through the corporate project process, implemented by the City Gardens section but managed and marketed by the Planning team. The opening of these new schemes is often marked with a launch event or opening ceremony, hosted by the developer responsible for the funding. As Members are invited to these events, there is little to be gained from including the new site as part of an annual committee visit.

## **Proposals**

6. For the reasons outlined above, it is proposed to discontinue the annual committee visit in its current form. Instead, on those rare occasions when there is a major issue or a substantial site refurbishment on the agenda with which Members are not already familiar, Members would be notified that officers will be available on site at a set time on the morning of the committee meeting in order to interpret the issue/improvement and to answer questions.
7. It is understood that for major projects led by the City Gardens team, such as the re-opening of Finsbury Circus post Crossrail, these would need to be recognised through a more formal visit or event, subject to available funding.

## **Implications**

8. At a time when officers are tasked with minimising unnecessary expenditure in line with the Service Based Review, even small savings such as minibus hire for the visit are welcomed.

## **Conclusion**

9. For quite understandable reasons, attendance at the annual committee visit to City Gardens has dwindled. It is therefore recommended that the visit in its current format be discontinued, on the understanding that site visits can be arranged by exception, should there be any important issues or major site improvements in the future.

## **Appendices**

None

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