

Introduction

For over 150 years, the City of London Corporation has been the proud conservator and sole trustee of some of the UK's most treasured green spaces. As the sole trustee of eight registered charities, the City Corporation holds and manages 11,000 acres of green space across London and south-east England – including woodlands, parks, and nature reserves – which welcome over 47 million visitors each year.

Summary

1. This review is about looking after our green spaces.

The review aims to ensure that the City of London Corporation's Natural Environment Charities, which manage 11,000 acres of green space, are fit for the future – with strong governance and greater financial resilience. This will ensure they continue to thrive as places of natural beauty, public recreation and community value for generations to come.

2. This review is not about cutting funding or reducing our commitment.

The City Corporation, as sole trustee of each of the Natural Environment Charities, will continue to preserve and protect these spaces. The review is about helping our Charities become more resilient and sustainable, so they can continue to thrive and deliver even greater benefit to the public. As with many organisations, the Corporation has a limited budget and is facing increasing costs, so we need to enable our Charities to generate any additional income they need from new and diversified sources.

3. The public's access to these spaces will not change.

All open access sites will remain open to everyone in accordance with usual policies and procedures. This review focuses on the structures and funding behind the scenes – not on how people use and enjoy these places.

4. We are not proposing significant changes to the way our green spaces are accessed and used.

We recognise that some of our Natural Environment Charities have more potential to generate income than others and this will be taken into consideration. While we may explore new ways to raise income, these green spaces are protected under the charities' governing documents and uses will respect each charity's purpose and values. Our priority is protecting nature and preserving the character of each site, whilst enabling public access for recreation.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Natural Environment Charities Review?

In July 2019, the City Corporation took the decision that a Corporate Charities Review (CC Review) should be undertaken to ensure that each charity within the scope of the Review continues to be well managed and governed, achieving maximum impact for its beneficiaries. A review of the Natural Environment Charities (NECR) began in 2022.

The Review aims to ensure our Natural Environment Charities' long-term sustainability and refine their funding models and governance. It will also give them greater flexibility to operate, generate income, build reserves where possible, invest in conservation, and enhance services.

The NECR aims to ensure our Natural Environment Charities have a resilient future and that their open spaces continue to thrive as places of natural beauty, public recreation and community benefit.

The NECR is progressing along four interconnected workstreams:

1. **Assets:** To carry out a comprehensive audit of land assets, both those held by the City Corporation as trustee of the Natural Environment Charities, or otherwise by the City Corporation for strategic and operational reasons to support the Charities.
2. **Grant Funding Model:** To give greater clarity and definition to annual funding contributions and support from the City Corporation's estate, and better empower each charity to raise and manage funds.
3. **Governance:** To review and improve decision-making and reporting structures according to each charity's governing document, regulatory requirements and recommended charity practice.
4. **Income generation:** To assess appropriate new and enhanced ways for the Natural Environment Charities to generate their own income, including fundraising from external sources.

Why is the Corporation changing its funding model for the Natural Environment Charities?

Following the global pandemic, the demand for public access to green space increased dramatically, and this demand has remained strong. This has also coincided with increasing climate pressures, together with an increase in the overall cost of maintaining these wonderful green spaces. To meet modern day challenges, our Charities need greater flexibility to operate, generate income, invest in conservation, and enhance their services. This Review aims to ensure they have a resilient future and continue to thrive as places of natural beauty and community benefit.

Is the Corporation reducing funding for its Natural Environment charities?

The Review is not a cost-cutting exercise. The City Corporation, as the sole trustee of each of the NE Charities, remains committed to protecting and supporting these spaces. The Review is about empowering our Charities to achieve greater financial resilience, with more flexibility to generate income, build reserves, and access external support.

Are you trying to raise money from the public?

Like most other green space providers, our charities have been raising income for many years. This Review will make it easier for everyone – individuals, grant-makers, or businesses – who wants to support our Natural Environment Charities to do so.

Will public access to the open spaces change?

No. All open access sites will remain open to everyone in accordance with usual policies and procedures. This Review is about strengthening how the Charities are structured, governed and funded – it will not affect how the public uses the spaces.

Will this effect user experience day-to-day?

No changes are planned to daily operations as part of this Review. Our teams will continue to protect habitats and wildlife, conserve heritage assets, welcome visitors, and maintain the sites as usual. Any significant future changes – eg, new visitor facilities - would be carefully planned and we would engage with local stakeholders.

What happens if a charity doesn't raise enough money?

The City Corporation will remain the sole trustee and is ultimately responsible for the Natural Environment Charities, the purposes of which are the preservation of the relevant green spaces in perpetuity for the recreation and enjoyment of the public. The aim of the Review is to deliver improvements to the governance and management of the Natural Environment Charities, to ensure that the Corporation, as trustee, can demonstrate compliance with its various obligations, and that the Charities can operate in a more self-determining and financially sustainable way into the future.

The Natural Environment Charities are moving from a deficit-funded model (where the Corporation pays agreed net costs not covered by other income) to a grant funding model (where the Charities are allocated an annual core contribution by the Corporation). This will enable the Charities to build financial reserves where possible, support additional income generation and improve long-term planning.

Who made the decision to carry out the Review?

As trustee, the City Corporation is subject to a range of legal and regulatory requirements, for example, to always act in the best interests of each Charity, and to keep their charities' governance under review. The decision to carry out the Review was made by the Corporation having due regard to its charity trustee duties.

What will happen next?

Epping Forest and West Ham Park began moving to the new model in April 2025, where their local budgets are supported through a grant-based approach. From April 2026, the remaining Charities will follow: Hampstead Heath, Queens Park and Highgate Wood, Ashted Common, Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common, Coulsdon and Other Commons, and West Wickham Common and Spring Park Wood.

The transition to the grant funded model is being implemented carefully in phases due to the complexity of transferring particular parts of the budget – eg, the funding of buildings maintenance.

Why is the City Corporation the trustee of these green open space charities?

The Corporation was instrumental in acquiring and protecting many of these green spaces in the 19th Century and has considerable experience of working with and through charities, reflecting the organisation's many and varied functions. The City Corporation has won many awards and secured international planning protections to ensure these green open spaces are conserved.

Is the City Corporation planning to make the Natural Environment Charities completely independent?

No, the City Corporation will remain the sole trustee of the Charities. This Review aims to improve the long-term sustainability of our open spaces charities and strengthen their funding models and governance. This will give them greater flexibility to operate, generate income, invest in conservation, and enhance services. We remain committed to protecting and preserving these sites as spaces for public recreation and enjoyment - and we will continue to invest in them and champion their future.

Will these green spaces become more commercialised, for example by holding additional large-scale events?

While the Natural Environment Charities may explore opportunities to generate additional income through appropriate activities, any decisions regarding events or commercial activities will continue to be made carefully. Each of the open spaces has an events policy, which sets out detailed requirements on the holding of events, having regard to the governing documents of each charity and any restrictions and sensitivities applying to the site. There are no plans for additional large-scale commercial events – the focus will remain on protecting the natural and historic environment and facilitating use of the spaces for access and recreation, in line with charity priorities.

How will engagement with key stakeholders on the review take place, and how will their feedback be taken into account?

Engagement with stakeholders will be a priority throughout the Review process. As a member-led organisation accountable to the City Corporation's Court of Common Council, regular meetings will continue to be held with the Chairs of the Committees with particular responsibility for the governance of the Natural Environment Charities, with engagement with the Chairs of the Finance and Policy Committees as required.

A new Member group focused on appropriate income generation has been created to enable Members with expertise in this area to provide direct input and benefit from external advice. Each charity's Consultative Committee or group will be kept informed on key decisions and the progress of the NECR and have opportunities to voice concerns and offer feedback, according to their respective governance arrangements. All feedback will be considered carefully, and relevant updates will be shared with all involved groups to enable participation throughout the Review.

Please refer to the Quarterly Update posted in the Transformation section of the [Natural Environment Department's webpage](#) for further reports on the NECR's progress.



