

Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission held on Monday 10 July 2023 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street, London, SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Margy Newens (Chair)
Councillor Graham Neale
Councillor David Watson
Councillor Cassandra Brown
Councillor Leo Pollak

**OTHER MEMBERS
PRESENT:**

**OFFICER
SUPPORT:** Tara Quinn, Head of parks and Natural Environment,
Environment and Leisure
Julian Fowgies, Tree Services Manager, Environment and
Leisure
Jon Best, Ecology Officer, Environment and Leisure
Julie Timbrell, Project Manager, scrutiny

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ketzia Harper and Councillor Reggie Popoola.

1. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were none.

4. SOUTHWARK NATURE ACTION PLAN (SNAP) AND TREE MANAGEMENT

The chair drew the Commission's attention to the report on Southwark Nature Action Plan (SNAP) and Tree Planting Progress, and explained that this item is to support the planned review into Biodiversity.

The following officers were invited to present:

- Tara Quinn, Head of parks and Natural Environment, Environment and Leisure
- Julian Fowgies, Tree Services Manager, Environment and Leisure
- Jon Best, Ecology Officer, Environment and Leisure

The chair then invited questions and the following points were made:

- There is a new government requirement to deliver and produce a nature action plan to deliver biodiversity net gain, which means the SNAP will be reframed and updated.
- In response to a question on capacity and resources officers explained there will be additional capacity provided through the planned appointment of a biodiversity project officer, who will particularly focus on the tree planting programme.
- Measures are being taken to protect vulnerable trees, which now go on a list and are watered every week or two.
- Members relayed concerns from residents that there is not enough collaboration between Tree Maintenance and Parks regarding care of tree watering bags, with reports of problems with bags been strimmed; not being resilient enough and being damage by rats. Officers said that they recognise that feedback and have been acting on these problems by buying better bags and issuing communication to park maintenance personal to be careful.
- The Ecology Officer said that he is invited to comment on Major Development plans and makes conditions, such as incorporating insect hotels, swift and bee bricks, bat tubes, green roofs, a mix of grass and promoting biodiversity net gain. He commented that photo – electric measures such as solar are complimentary to green roofs.
- Members asked about his role in smaller applications and the Ecology Officer commented that he does minor applications up to 9 units and occasionally comments on householder applications.
- Members asked about creating a dark sky borough and the Ecology Officer said that they do ask developers to think about light especially near parks. There is also a curfew applied to certain sports parks. There is a dialogue

about creating dark bat corridors. A rare type of bat has been found in local woods, which has increased its range. Canada Water is considered dark.

- The Tree Services Manager was asked about use of wood timber. He said that the council do wood chip timber from parks and also encourage people to get in touch. This is cost neutral.
- Members asked about the poor performance of tree contractors, which led to trees dying last year in the hot weather. The officer said that the council have identified two suppliers that have not come up to performance standards, and did not provide the young trees with sufficient water. There is a contractual obligation to replace these trees. These contractors will be excluded from future awards. He went on to explain that the new tree planting role is bespoke so will be able to improve monitoring.
- The council is looking particularly at opportunities to improve canopy cover in the north of the borough as this is sometimes as low as 8% , whereas there is around 20% in the south of the borough. Officers have commissioned reports and dealt with low hanging opportunities such as replacement, and are now looking at tree pits and other methods to improve rooting facility.
- Members commented that constituents often contact ward councillors regarding trees felling, as residents do get upset at loss of neighbourhood trees. Members said they realised this is almost always because of disease or some other health & safety consideration, however they asked what more could be done to communicate the reasons to residents. The Head of Parks and the Natural Environment said that an update to the website is due to improve communication. She added that there are opportunities to improve communication through use of social media to explain the inspections programme, as well as promoting the good work the council is doing to improve tree cover and opportunities to get involved with local tree groups.
- Members asked about the River Thames and the completion of the Super Sewer, and if this presented an opportunity to engage with the Thames as a natural asset and improve foreshore habitats. The Ecology Officer said that the council do connect with various groups. There is a problem with the sheer walls but in places there are opportunities such a wall set back in Surrey Docks Farm. A project at a wharf tried an approach to improve biodiversity, which did not work, however now there is new technology and funding opportunities, and there might be an opportunity to create a Sand Martin bank.
- Members asked about water sources and if the council ought to retrofit water butts and make these a condition of Planning. Officers said that they do provide stand pipes using water from the Thames, however there is a cost. There is also mobile sources of water. Members asked about water butts on estates in particular. Officer said that they are working on a project

to move water around Russia Dock, and welcomed the proposal to make water butts a condition of planning.

- Officers were asked why there is a 24% target for canopy cover and were told this was the Mayor of London's target. The council is due to make another assessment and hope that canopy cover will have improved, however they said that new development can significantly reduce tree cover, although they will have tree mitigation plans in the longer term to increase cover.
- Members asked about use of glyphosate in parks and were told that it is not used as a matter of course. Exceptions are Japanese Knotweed, and other another invasive species, where it tends to get painted on the plant, rather than sprayed. Officer said that use on streets is limited to once or twice a year.
- Members asked about community engagement and officers reported that they have started to engage with schools to encourage more planting outside and inside schools. They added that the Peckham Woods worked well for engagement and is a model of good practice. The Head of Parks and Natural Environment said there these initiatives were linked to an engagement plan.
- Members commented that loss of front gardens is often linked to creating a car parking stand and asked officer if they had any data on this. Officers said that wildlife gardening can be combined with parking.

RESOLVED

Officers will provide more information on loss of front gardens, the scale of the problem and how this can be mitigated or prevented.

5. SUSTAINABLE FREIGHT SCRUTINY REVIEW

The chair drew members attention to the headline report, circulated with the agenda, summarising the work conducted last year.

The chair recommended that this is completed with some final evidence taken to address the following gaps :

- TfL/ GLA plans to support Sustainable Freight are understood and that these bodies are lobbied effectively to support the Council's plans.
- How the Council and Business Improvement Districts can deliver Nests to enable hubs to receive, and then deliver the 'last mile' of online shopping by e cargo bikes.
- How to best encourage and enable citizens to make the switch to Sustainable Freight – for example opting for "click and collect" rather than door-to-door delivery.

In addition, following the interview with the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks, Streets & Clean Air, at the last meeting of the previous administrative year, the Commission resolved to request the following briefings that intersect with the review and will be requested for the November meeting:

- How the weight of vehicles [with reference to the growing number of Electrical Vehicles (EV) and their increased weight due to battery size] and consequent impact on increased production of tyre and other particulates, plus increased morbidity and mortality if involved in accidents, is being considered, and the link with emission based parking charges.
- Updated information on car ownership using ONS data overlaid with parking provision.

RESOLVED

The commission members supported this and in addition suggested that the commission:

- hear from the Port of London on work to increase river freight , including an initiative at Bank Side,
- investigate a planning application for a cargo hub / distribution centre at Old Kent Road,
- hear from sustainable tyre manufactories,
- Invite Imperial to give evidence on brake and tyre dust.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed the work programme. The chair advised that, in addition to the work plan circulated, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission had recommended that a joint review be conducted between the Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission and the Health and Social Care scrutiny commission looking a how Streets for People can improve Air Quality.

The commission discussed seeking an update on recommendations from the previous Energy review undertaken in 2021/22, possibly though an interview with the cabinet member New Homes and Sustainable Development.

The meeting ended at 8:10pm.