



Natural Environment



Community Engagement Strategy

A photograph of a park scene. In the foreground, a man in a light blue shirt and a woman in a patterned dress are sitting on the grass, looking at something together. In the background, a man is sitting on a wooden bench. The scene is surrounded by large, leafy green trees, and the ground is covered in grass and shadows from the trees.

Introduction and context

The City of London Corporation manages over 11,000 acres of stunning open spaces including 58,000 ancient trees, six Sites of Special Scientific Interest and three National Nature Reserves. These open spaces deliver a wide range of 'ecosystem services' such as timber, food, biodiversity, carbon capture and storage, flood mitigation, air purification, and health and wellbeing benefits. The total economic value of these benefits is estimated to be £30-£40 million per year. The sites capture thousands of tonnes of carbon and attract an estimated 25 million visitors annually.

The Natural Environment Division forms part of the City of London Corporation's Environment Department. We manage nine Charities, through which our open spaces are governed and whose objects reflect our vision. Our management of open spaces and assets supports the role of London as a world-class city. We work with local authorities, statutory and Government agencies, special interest groups, schools, businesses, community groups, residents and people who are not typically represented. By reaching out to these wider communities, we seek to ensure our long-term relevance.

The Natural Environment Strategies set out the City of London Corporation's strategic approach to our managed open spaces, assets and activities. They build upon over 150 years of stewardship of open spaces across London and the South-East. They explain the importance of the natural environment to the achievement of economic, societal and environmental outcomes described in our Corporate Plan 2024-29. They describe why we all need to act now and our proposed approach during the next five years. The Strategies describe our objectives for the natural environment and the measures by which we will assess our performance against those objectives. The Strategies will inform our business plans and management plans and set out how our activities will align with corporate and regional priorities and policies.

Purpose

As stewards of the environment and public open spaces, our success in community engagement is a measurement of our success in our public service, charitable, and stewardship obligations. We define our obligation as 'active participation of residents and communities in decisions that affect their lives.' The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that those we serve are actively and appropriately welcomed into our work and public spaces, leading to improved ways of working and service delivery.

Importantly, community engagement is both an end and a means to an end. It is something we do in furtherance of our commitment to good governance, but also is a means to succeeding in delivering our other strategies and achieving our other goals.

Key Themes

Five identified strategic themes are:

1. Partnership: Creating meaningful and lasting partnerships
2. Removing barriers: Identifying and removing barriers to participation in our spaces and work
3. Ownership: Cultivating a sense of deep pride in and attachment to our spaces amongst users
4. Thriving spaces: Creating spaces that attract people and improve their lives
5. Knowledge exchange: Continuous transfer of information between the Corporation and its customers



Links to Corporate Plan

Community engagement is a prevailing concept in the new 2024-29 Corporate Plan. The Community Engagement Strategy furthers all four themes in this Corporate Plan, which are shared below:

- **Your City:** If you call the city home, your place of work, where you learn, or the place to visit, we provide you with outstanding public services. We are focused on meeting your needs with services that are accessible and deliver value through health and wellbeing, education, social mobility and inclusion. We are a world class organisation, ensuring all who work for the City Corporation are capable, efficient, and meeting customer needs.
- **Competitive City:** We are the leading global centre of choice for financial and professional services, and the home of innovation, skills, and green finance, sustaining the UK's dominance in the global market.
- **Vibrant City:** We are the best cultural hub in London for welcoming and nurturing innovative and creative talent. We inspire pride in our heritage and respect for our traditions. Our Vibrant City is a place where people want to spend time, enjoy, value and remember.
- **Sustainable City:** We are a leader in Net Zero, acting on climate change and protecting our city for generations to come. We maintain beautiful parks, green spaces, streets and riversides, enabling our natural environment and all who use it to thrive.

Specifically, the themes in the proposed community engagement strategy further all four themes in the new Corporate Plan, with commonalities and interdependency of stated themes, as summarised in the table below:

	Your City	Competitive City	Vibrant City	Sustainable City
Partnership	Commitment to "engagement" and "meeting needs"			Furthering ambitious environmental policy and maintaining natural assets through commitment to partnership building
Removing barriers	Value through "social mobility, accessibility and inclusion"	Being a global "centre of choice"	"Welcoming and nurturing" talent	Furthering ambitious environmental policy and maintaining natural assets through commitment to expanding participation in delivery
Ownership	"Your" city as a home, literally and figuratively	Being the "home" of innovation, green finance, etc	Inspiring pride and respect for tradition	Furthering ambitious environmental policy and maintaining natural assets through commitment to fostering pride in success
Thriving spaces		Market "dominance"	Being a "hub" and place where people "want to spent time"	Furthering ambitious environmental policy and maintaining natural assets through commitment to delivering related societal benefits
Knowledge transfer	"Accessible" services	Extending dominance into "global market"		Furthering ambitious environmental policy and maintaining natural assets through commitment to sharing what we learn and do

Community engagement will indeed be both an **end** and a **means to an end** in the Corporation's future success.



Key themes

Theme 1: Partnership

Theme 1, Objective 1:

Build and sustain meaningful and lasting partnerships with the communities we serve

Theme 1, Objective 2:

Implement a holistic approach to community engagement that encourages active participation

Theme 1, Objective 3:

Cultivate and support successful partner organisations that support us in mission delivery

Measures

Measures 1 and 2: Community Engagement Toolkit.

Development of a Community Engagement Toolkit that provides guidance on best practice engagement in a variety of circumstances and contexts. (Complete by 31 March 2025.)

Measure 2: Delivery of value-added activities in NE spaces

Number of partnership organisations that are delivering approved value-added activities in NE spaces.



Key themes

Theme 2: Removing barriers

Theme 2, Objective 1:

Ensure diverse and representative participation in our work and spaces

Theme 2, Objective 2:

Create physical spaces that are as accessible as possible to as many people as possible

Theme 2, Objective 3:

Engage in continuous self-reflection to identify opportunities for continuous improvement

Measures

Measure 1: Community Engagement Toolkit.

Development of a Community Engagement Toolkit that provides guidance on best practice engagement in a variety of circumstances and contexts. (Complete by 31 March 2025.)

Measure 2: Self audit

Initial self-audit of access challenges and opportunities at each NE space, with relevant participating partners, updated annually.

Measure 3: Self audit

Initial self-audit of access challenges and opportunities at each NE space, with relevant participating partners, updated annually.



Key themes

Theme 3: Ownership

Theme 3, Objective 1:

Facilitate a deep sense of pride in and attachment to our open spaces among user groups and communities

Theme 3, Objective 2:

Create opportunities for user groups and communities to provide additional resource to the Corporation to support mission delivery

Measures

Measure 1: Volunteer programme

Participation in, as measured by hours given, number of participants, and funds secured

Fundraising programme

Donations across NE and at each space

Measure 2: Volunteer programme

Participation in, as measured by hours given, number of participants, and funds secured

Fundraising programme

Donations across NE and at each space



Key themes

Theme 4: Thriving spaces

Theme 4, Objective 1:

Improve health and wellbeing through our open spaces through successful and effective community engagement

Theme 4, Objective 2:

Deliver well-managed spaces that are widely understood as destinations for improved health and wellbeing

Theme 4, Objective 3 :

Provide a diverse mix of opportunities for enrichment at our open spaces

Theme 4, Objective 4:

Create spaces where formative experiences occur

Measures

Measures 1 and 2: Communications

Create a communications plan that promotes the health and wellbeing improvement opportunities at City of London Corporation open spaces.

Measure 3: Portfolio of enrichment opportunities available at each space

Agree and track categories of enrichment opportunities available at each space, eg, active recreation, passive recreation, forest bathing learning, etc.

Measure 4: Number of activities intended to engage people in experiences for the first time



Key themes

Theme 5: Knowledge transfer

Theme 5, Objective 1:

Ensure easy access to information about the Corporation, its open spaces, and our management practices

Theme 5, Objective 2:

Catalyse improved behaviours in our spaces where needed

Theme 5, Objective 3:

Ensure greater understanding among members of the public of the Corporation's efforts to preserve and care for our spaces

Theme 5, Objective 4

Improve service delivery by the Corporation at its open spaces through information exchange

Measures

Measure 1: Information audit

Audit availability of digital and physical information from COL-managed information resources.

Measures 2 and 3: Communications

Create a communications plan that promotes positive and encouraged behaviours in City of London Corporation open spaces, and provides clear information on the resources the Corporation commits to its open spaces.

How will the strategy be implemented?

The Natural Environment Division will implement the Community Engagement Strategy through:

- High-level Departmental Business Plans
- Divisional Business Plans
- Sub-divisional business plans
- Environment Board strategies
- Space-specific management strategies (eg, Hampstead Heath Management Strategy)
- Other relevant plans and strategies across the Corporation
- Day-to-day practices and culture of our organisation
- The communities we engage, since if we are successful we will be cultivating new relationships and partnerships.

With a strong mandate from the Corporate Plan, we will have clear direction and a solid foundation of support – and expectation – upon which success will be built.

Community engagement will indeed be both an end and a means to an end in the Corporation's future success across the full universe of communities with which we engage – public, private, professional, voluntary, residential, business, etc.

Cross-cutting themes

- **Community engagement:** All strategies rely upon some sort of community engagement to success
- **Partnership:** Working with others in meaningful ways to maximise results
- **Balance:** Striking a balance between engagement of people and protection of sensitive spaces
- **Resourcing:** To succeed, all strategies must have sufficient resourcing.

