

Review of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Tower Hamlets

Background

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) in Tower Hamlets were most recently identified following a borough-wide habitat survey carried out by the Greater London Authority in 2004. The agreed site list and boundaries were published in 2005. Government guidance on local wildlife sites (DEFRA 2006) recommends that sites are reviewed every 5-10 years. It was agreed to review the SINCs in advance of the Site and Place Making development plan document, to be submitted in late 2011, so that the revised Proposals Map includes up to date SINCs.

Methodology

The review was undertaken by the Council's Biodiversity Officer, John Archer, who has over 20 years experience of survey and evaluation of nature conservation sites in London. Sites to be assessed were visited once between mid May and early August 2011 and surveyed using the standard format for London recommended in the Mayor of London's Biodiversity Strategy. Details of habitats were recorded, along with significant higher plants, birds and readily-identifiable invertebrates. In addition, for sites where wintering birds are likely to be an important part of their value (in Tower Hamlets these are all water bodies), between two and seven visits were undertaken between October 2010 and April 2011 to count water birds. All sites included in the review were assessed according to the criteria set out in the Mayor of London's Biodiversity Strategy.

Coverage

Resources were not available to undertake a full resurvey of all open space in the borough. The survey therefore concentrated on existing SINCs and sites identified by members of the Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Partnership as being potential new SINCs. The partnership's Steering Group and action plan working groups were asked to recommend potential sites. A few existing SINCs were not included in the survey. These were either sites for which there is plenty of recent data indicating that they are still important for nature conservation, or sites where access could not be arranged.

Consultation

Draft recommendations were drawn up by the Biodiversity Officer and circulated to relevant Council officers and to members of the Steering Group of the Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Partnership. The draft proposals were discussed at a meeting of the Steering Group, and revised in the light of that discussion and other comments received. The group of people considering the draft proposals included the following:

Peter Cole (LBTH Planning, EIA Officer)
Peter Farnham (LBTH Interim Head of Strategic Planning)
Kenneth Greenway (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)
Terry Lyle (all-round naturalist and acknowledged expert on Tower Hamlets wildlife)
Roy MacPepple (Tower Hamlets Homes lead officer for biodiversity)
Mohammed Raja (LBTH Parks lead officer for biodiversity)
Katie Roberts (Trees for Cities Projects Director)
Michael Rowan (LBTH Head of Parks)
Rita Serra (Thames21, lead for Rivers Habitat Action Plan)
Mark Spencer (LNHS Recorder for higher plants)
John Swindells (local resident and expert botanist)
Mike Wilton (Landscape Manager, Gateway Housing Association)

Re-evaluation of some exiting SINC

Several existing Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (Local Sites) do meet the criteria for designation as SINC. They are formal open spaces (parks or churchyards) with mature trees, but are not managed for nature conservation, and have no features of particular nature conservation significance. For the majority of these, there is no evidence that their nature conservation value has in any way declined since they were identified as SINC. All of them were presumably selected as Local Sites largely on the basis that they provide access to nature for local people, but they appear to lack the intrinsic nature conservation value essential for designation as a SINC. These sites are to be deleted as SINC, but it is important to ensure that this does not convey a negative message, as there has not been a loss of wildlife habitat. Indeed, habitat creation in a number of parks and open spaces has raised the level of biodiversity in Tower Hamlets parks, so that there are now places offering far better experiences of nature.

Summary of recommendations

Code	Name	Change
M006	London's Canals	no change
M031	The River Thames and Bow Creek	no change
M071	Lea Valley	no change
M117	Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park	no change
M133	Mudchute Park and Farm	no change
THBI01	The Greenway in Tower Hamlets	no change
THBI02	Victoria Park	no change
THBI03	Mile End Park	boundary change
THBI04	East India Dock Basin	no change
THBI08	Poplar Dock and Blackwall Basin	Split and downgrade Poplar Dock to Local Importance (new site THL30)
THBII01	Millwall and West India Docks	boundary change
THBII03	St Jude's Nature Park (Bethnal Green NR)	no change
THBII04	Cable Street Community Garden	no change
THBII05	Stepping Stones Farm	no change
THBII06	Spitalfields City Farm & Allen Gardens	boundary change
THBII07	London Wall & wall of the Tower of London	no change
THBII08	Spitalfields Viaduct	delete
THBII11	Pinchin Street Disused Railway	no change
THBII12	Weavers Fields	upgraded – see THL05
THBII13	Shadwell Basin, Wapping Wood and Wapping Canals	Upgraded and expanded – see THL07
THL01	St George in the East Church Gardens	no change
THL02	Wapping Gardens	delete
THL03	Old Railway at Fairfoot Road	no change
THL04	Ion Square Gardens	no change
THL05	Weavers Fields	upgrade to BII
THL06	Stoneyard Lane	delete
THL07	Shadwell Basin	upgrade to BII and add Wapping Wood and Wapping Canal
THL08	Swedenborg Gardens	no change
THL09	Bancroft Road Nature Garden	delete
THL10	St Leonards Priory	delete

THL12	Perring Community Garden	no change
THL13	Disused Railway from Old Ford	boundary change
THL14	Hermitage Basin	no change
THL15	St Katharine's Dock	no change
THL16	St Dunstan's Churchyard, Stepney	delete
THL17	St Anne's Churchyard, Limehouse	no change
THL18	Wellclose Street Rough	delete
THL19	St Paul's Churchyard, Shadwell	delete
THL20	All Saints Churchyard, Poplar	delete
THL21	Poplar Park & St Matthias Old Churchyard	delete
THL22	Millwall Park	no change
THL23	Cyril Jackson School Nature Area	no change
THL24	St Luke's C of E School Wild Area	delete
THL25	Aberfeldy Millennium Green	delete
THL26	Robin Hood Gardens	no change
THL27	Meath Gardens	no change
THL28	Ropemakers Field	delete
THL29	St Bartholomew's Gardens	delete
THL30	Poplar Dock	downgraded – see THBI08
THL31	Saffron Avenue Pond	new
THL32	King Edward Memorial Park	new

Note: “no change” includes sites with minor boundary corrections

Recommendations site by site

Brief reasons are given for all proposed changes.

THBI03 Mile End Park

The boundary around the Leisure Centre appears to be out of date and needs correcting, taking into account of the planned Crossrail shaft. The southernmost section of the park, which was previously excluded from the SINIC, should also be included. A future review should consider upgrading to Metropolitan Importance.



THBI08 Poplar Dock and Blackwall Basin

Since the original designation of this site in 1996, almost all the surrounding wasteland has been developed, and both water bodies are now used for mooring boats. Blackwall Basin still has a large area of open water with rafts, and still supports nesting common terns; its 3 pairs in 2011 were the most of any water body in the borough. Therefore, although it has declined in value, it is certainly still of Borough Importance, and probably still worth Borough Grade I. Poplar Dock is now a marina, with little open water, and supports rather few water birds, though a pair of tufted ducks bred in 2011. Poplar Dock on its own is of no more than Local Importance. **Split this site, with Blackwall Basin retained as a Borough I site and Poplar Dock to become a new Site of Local Importance THL30.**

THBII01 Millwall & West India Docks

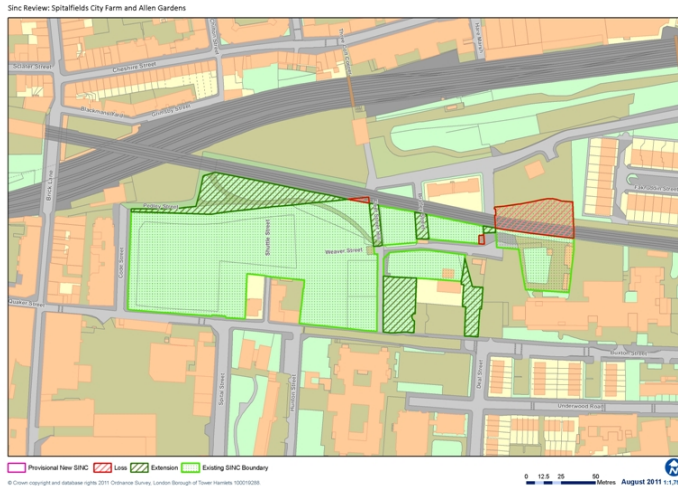
Significant areas of West India Docks have been lost to development in recent years and will be deleted from the site. There is a semi-circle of flower-rich grassland adjacent to the eastern end of Millwall Outer Dock. This contains restharrow, known nowhere else in the borough, and field madder, which is scarce in the borough, as well as a very high density of commoner wild flowers, similar to chalk grassland. **Add this grassland to the SINC.**

Sinc Review: Millwall and West India Docks



THBII06 Spitalfields City Farm and Allen Gardens

The building of the East London Line extension in 2007 has led to the loss of part of the City Farm, which moved to occupy part of Allen Gardens. There has, however, been significant habitat creation to the north of Allen Gardens, with new meadows created alongside the new viaduct. **Add these areas to the site.**



THBII08 Spitalfields Viaduct

The north-western part of the viaduct was redeveloped during the construction of the East London Line extension in 2007, and all habitat on this part has been lost. While small areas of vegetation remain on other parts of the viaduct (according to aerial photos, as no views from the ground were possible), this appears very fragmented and is likely to be of very limited nature conservation value. **Delete the SINC.**

THL02 Wapping Gardens

This is a formal park with mature trees, apparently lacking significant nature conservation value. There are other sites nearby, such as Wapping Wood, which offer far better experience of nature. **Delete the SINC.**

THL05 Weavers Fields

The woodland in the east of the park has matured nicely and is being well managed with a nature trail. It is a significant area of woodland in a borough context. Small areas of meadow and further woodland plantings have been created elsewhere in the park. **Upgrade to Borough Grade II Importance THBII12.**

THL06 Stoneyard Lane

This tiny site on Poplar High Street consists largely of native shrubs, which, for security reasons, are kept to about a metre in height. Its small size, intense management and high levels of disturbance severely limit its nature conservation value and ability to offer an experience of nature. **Delete the SINC.**

THL07 Shadwell Basin

The general numbers of waterfowl using the basin would support its retention as a Local Site. However, a pair of common terns bred successfully in 2011, one of only two known successful breeding sites in the borough. **Upgrade this site to Borough Grade II (THBII13) and add the following two areas of land to the site.**

Wapping Canal

The shallow canals between Hermitage Basin and Wapping Wood support a rich submerged vegetation, including small pondweed (*Potamogeton pusillus*) and common stonewort (*Chara vulgaris*), which are rare in London. The advice of the London Natural History Society's recorder for plants is that these species make the site of more than Local Importance. **Add this to the new Shadwell Basin Borough Grade II site.**

THL09 Bancroft Road Nature Garden

This site has not been managed as a nature garden for several years, and is currently inaccessible and neglected. It is a narrow strip of woodland and scrub beside the railway, which provides some habitat for common birds and other wildlife, and something of a green backdrop for a few local residents. It is debatable whether, without access or management, it warrants retention as a Local site. **Delete the SINC.**

THL10 St Leonard's Priory

An adventure playground at the time of its SINC designation, this former churchyard has been disused for some years, but is in the process of being restored as a community garden, led by Trees for Cities. It is currently rather bare beneath the canopy of trees, and provides little for nature conservation or access to nature in its present state. However, biodiversity is one of the main drivers of the restoration, so its value is likely to return. **Delete this SINC, and review again when the new community garden is established.**

THL12 Perring Garden

No access could be arranged, and no views are available from public places. Aerial photos indicate there is still a garden present. In the absence of any evidence for making a change, **retain this as a Local site.**

THL13 Disused Railway from Old Ford

This disused railway runs along the western side of the East Cross Route. It is divided into three sections by the Hertford Union Canal and Wick Lane. No access was possible, but most of the site is viewable from footbridges. The section north of the canal consists of a mosaic of woodland, scrub and grassland, and appears to be good wildlife habitat, which meets SINC criteria. The small middle section between the canal and Wick Lane has been lost to development, and will be deleted from the site. The section south of Wick Lane is still extant. It is very narrow, and a row of cypress trees, planted alongside the main road as a sound barrier, occupy much of its width for about two-thirds of its extent. Most of the rest of this section consists of extensive stands of Japanese knotweed and buddleia. It seems to be of minimal nature conservation value in its current state, and there is probably little likelihood of it getting the beneficial management required to restore it. **Delete everything south of the canal.**

THL16 St Dunstan's Churchyard, Stepney

This is a formal churchyard with mature trees, apparently lacking significant nature conservation value. There are other sites nearby, such as Stepney City Farm and Mile End Park, which offer far better experience of nature. **Delete the SINC.**

THL18 Wellclose Street Rough

This site has been cleared of vegetation and, from aerial photos, seems to have been kept clear of vegetation for several years. Although no planning application has been made for redevelopment, it is of negligible nature conservation value in its current state. **Delete the SINC.**

THL19 St Paul's Churchyard, Shadwell

This is a formal churchyard with mature trees, apparently lacking significant nature conservation value. There are other sites nearby, such as King Edward Memorial Park, which offer far better experience of nature. **Delete the SINC.**

THL20 All Saints Churchyard, Poplar

This is a formal churchyard with mature trees, apparently lacking significant nature conservation value. **Delete the SINC.**

THL21 Poplar Park & St Matthias Old Churchyard

Poplar Park is a formal park with mature trees, apparently lacking significant nature conservation value. The churchyard has been neglected and is currently being restored, but does not seem to have any significant nature conservation value.

Delete the SINC.

THL24 St Luke's C of E School Wild Area

Part of this former school nature area is now occupied by a temporary building and hard surfaces. The remainder has been abandoned and is now a tangle of bramble, tall herbs and scrub. It would require significant management to make it useful for educational purposes, and there is little likelihood of this in the foreseeable future.

The tiny size of the site and its low diversity severely limits its intrinsic nature conservation value if it is not being used for environmental education. **Delete the SINC.**

THL25 Aberfeldy Millennium Green

This site appears to have declined significantly in nature conservation value since 2004. It now consists of gently undulating amenity grassland with scattered semi-mature trees, mostly non-native. The grassland is species-poor and there is little or no shrubbery. **Delete the SINC.**

THL26 Robin Hood Gardens

This is amenity land within a housing estate, dominated by a tall circular mound in the middle. The grass is kept short but, at least on the mound, is quite herb-rich, with species such as black knapweed perhaps suggesting some former wild flower planting. There are a couple of small patches of young woodland, one of them dominated by birch. Goldfinches nested in this in 2011. Of the current Local Sites in Poplar, this is clearly the best, and it has considerable potential for improving its nature conservation value. It is likely to be subject to considerable change when the blackwall Reach regeneration project is implemented. **Retain as a SINC while it remains in its current state.**

THL28 Ropemakers Field

This is a formal park with mature trees, apparently lacking significant nature conservation value. There are other sites nearby, such as the Limehouse Cut, which offer far better experience of nature. **Delete the SINC.**

THL29 St Bartholomew's Gardens

This is a formal park with mature trees, apparently lacking significant nature conservation value. There are other sites nearby, such as Allen Gardens and Weavers Fields, which offer far better experience of nature. **Delete the SINC.**

THL31 Saffron Avenue Pond

This is a sizeable pond on the edge of the East India Dock business estate. It has fairly extensive marginal beds of reed and reedmace and a fairly diverse submerged flora including hornwort and curled pondweed, both locally scarce native species. At least 5 species of dragonflies and damselflies breed in the pond, including a substantial population of red-eyed damselfly which is uncommon in London. The pond supports a large population of rudd, a scarce native fish, though these have clearly been introduced and not necessarily from a native source. **Add as a new Local Site.**



THL32 King Edward Memorial Park

Numerous habitat enhancements have been made in this park in recent years. Wild flower meadows have been created, a loggery installed and woodland ground flora planted in a shady area, and flower beds are maintained full of nectar-rich flowers. A small pond has breeding frogs. **Add as a new Local Site.**

