

Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Annual Report 2017



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Front cover photo: Volunteers with floating planter at Bow Locks (Ben Fenton)

Introduction

The Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan for 2014-19 (LBAP) was adopted by the Council's Cabinet on 1 October 2014. The LBAP was developed, and is being delivered, by a wide range of organisations and individuals. These make up the Tower Hamlets biodiversity partnership, known as Tower Habitats. Membership of the partnership and its steering group is given on the page 17 of this report.

This report covers progress on delivery for the third year of the LBAP, from October 2016 to September 2017 inclusive. It provides a summary of the main achievements during the year, and some of the projects planned for the coming year, in each of the four Habitat Action Plans which make up the LBAP. These are built environment, gardens and grounds, rivers and standing water, and parks and open spaces. It then provides a similar summary for the promotion and monitoring of the plan. Finally, progress towards each of the 36 objectives and targets for enhancing priority habitats and species is shown in a table, and the main implications are discussed.

We are now over half way through the implementation of the LBAP. Good progress has been made in identifying projects which will deliver most of the targets, and a number of targets have already been achieved and exceeded. As the report demonstrates, lots of very exciting projects, which greatly enhance the borough for people as well as wildlife, have been delivered. This includes some major development schemes which demonstrate how biodiversity enhancements can be successfully achieved in, on and around new housing and commercial buildings.



"Nectar-bars" at Approach Gardens (see page 6) (Colin Toogood)

Built environment



Sunflowers at Brion Place (Tim Wilcox)

Achievements in 2016/17

- Ballymore completed phase 1 of the London City Island development on the Leamouth (see page 5).
- Hovedean Properties constructed two new residential blocks beside 45 Millharbour with 250m² of biodiverse roofs, bat boxes and nest boxes for Swifts. One of the roofs includes habitat for the relocation of Jersey Cudweed, a protected plant which was found growing between paving on the site, and which was translocated to the roof under a licence from Natural England.
- The Council's Clean & Green volunteering team installed planters along Club Row, Old Nichol Street, Lockhart Street, Approach Road and Buxton Street. These were planted with a mix of colourful nectar-rich flowers, and many will be maintained by local volunteers under the award-winning Adopt-a-Garden scheme.
- The London Legacy Development Corporation created a landscaped walkway along Silvocea Way beside Bow Creek, as part of the Leeway walk. This includes areas of nectar-rich perennial planting, refuges for the protected Jersey Cudweed which was found growing on the verge, and native shrub planting including Buckthorn, the caterpillar food plant of the Brimstone butterfly.
- Poplar HARCA planted 6000 sunflowers around its estates, many of them along streets in tree pits (see photo above), to provide nectar for bees and seeds for birds.

Projects planned for 2017/18

- The Council's Highways team intends to create new rain gardens at Spindrift Avenue and St Leonard's Street.
- Phase 2 of the London City Island development will create 6295m² of biodiverse roofs, delivering half the target for open mosaic habitat, as well as a nest box for Peregrines on the tallest building (see below).
- The Council's Clean & Green team will install planters with nectar-rich flowers at Head Street, Bethnal Green Road, Commercial Road and Watney Market via the volunteering and Adopt-a-Garden programmes.

Case study: London City Island



London City Island site-wide green roof plan (Chris Blandford Associates)

London City Island is a very large, mixed use development on the Leamouth Peninsula. Surrounded on three sides by Bow Creek, and partly covered with typical brownfield habitats, this is a very sensitive site, where development could easily have caused significant adverse impacts on wildlife. Developer Ballymore took this on board from the start of the development process, and produced a plan to ensure the development delivered net gains for biodiversity. This includes features on the buildings, in the surrounding landscaping, and on the river walls.

Phase 1 of the development is now complete, and has provided 2603m² of biodiverse roofs of three different types; a semi-intensive amenity roof (green in the plan above), a planted extensive green roof (yellow), and a brownfield-style roof (pink/brown), the latter two aimed primarily at providing habitat for Black Redstarts. These are accompanied by nest boxes for Black Redstarts, with boxes for Swifts and artificial House Martin nests in suitable places on some of the buildings. The landscaping around the buildings includes areas of wildflower meadow and woodland, as well as lots of nectar-rich flowers in the more formal planting. The river walls have new habitat, including an intertidal terrace and timber fendering, an artificial Otter holt and nesting banks for Kingfishers and Sand Martins.

Phase 2, due for completion in the next year or so, will add a further 6295m² of biodiverse roofs, as well as a nest box for Peregrines. Overall, the green roofs on the site will deliver almost 90% of the target for new open mosaic habitat.

Gardens and grounds



Nectar-rich bulb planting at Sleaford House Green (Tim Wilcox)

Achievements in 2016/17

- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park completed bee-friendly gardens for Gateway Housing in Bow Road and for the City of London Corporation at Dron House in autumn 2017.
- The landscaping in Phase 1 of Ballymore's new London City Island development on the Leamouth Peninsula (see page 5) includes 300m² of wildflower meadows and around 900m² of predominantly-native woodland-style planting, as well as lots of nectar-rich flowers in the formal landscaping.
- With assistance from a Tower Habitats grant from the Tower Hill Trust (see page 12), residents at Approach Gardens undertook further habitat enhancements, bird and bat boxes, native hedge and planting in and around the pond. The "nectar bars" at the foot of food-growing beds (see photo on page 3) are a particularly nice innovation.
- Core Landscapes has created a temporary garden, with lots of wildlife habitats, on a disused part of the Royal London Hospital (see page 6).
- Tower Hamlets Homes created five annual wildflower meadows and planted nectar-rich bulbs in three sites on their estates in autumn 2017.
- The Council's Clean & Green team planted nectar-rich flowers at two schools, two children's centres and a sheltered housing scheme through their volunteering and Adopt-a-Garden programmes.
- Stepney Greencoat and Arnhem Wharf Schools enhanced their grounds for wildlife and environmental education through Tower Habitats grants from the Tower Hill Trust.
- Poplar HARCA planted 20,000 nectar-rich bulbs at Sleaford House Green (see photo above) and Baxter House.

Projects planned for 2017/18

- The Council's Clean & Green team intend to undertake nectar-rich planting at City Gateway College, Columbia School, Whitechapel Leisure Centre and St Paul's Church at Bow Common through their volunteering and Adopt-a-Garden programmes.
- Gateway Housing Association will restore the community garden at Pier Street, including wildlife enhancements.
- Malmesbury, Morpeth, Phoenix, Redlands, St Paul's Way, St Saviours and Stebon Schools will complete biodiversity enhancements in their grounds thanks to Tower Habitats biodiversity grants from the Tower Hill Trust.
- Bethnal Green Nature Reserve Trust will install bat boxes and enhance bat habitats at the nature reserve and in nearby housing estates and community gardens through a Tower Habitats grant from the Tower Hill Trust.

Case study: Core Landscapes Garden, Whitechapel



Core Landscapes Garden (John Archer)

Core Landscapes has created a temporary therapeutic garden at the Royal London Hospital site in Whitechapel, assisted by the Council's Whitechapel Vision and public health teams and Barts Health NHS Trust.

The garden contains a range of wildlife habitats, including two ponds, an assortment of bug houses, abundant nectar-rich flowers and several native trees. As well as offering a peaceful space for hospital staff and patients in an area with little green space, the meantime garden is involving volunteers from the local community who are positive about the therapeutic benefits of gardening.

The garden is designed to be movable, making use of temporarily available land as and when it becomes available, so everything is container grown from Hornbeam trees to salad leaves. Community and corporate volunteers along with support from local authorities, developers and the private sector help the project overcome logistical challenges to move and relocate when a lease expires.

Rivers and standing water



Planting a canalside meadow (John Archer)

Achievements in 2016/17

- As part of phase 1 of the London City Island development (see page 5) on the Leamouth Peninsula, Ballymore created terraces to provide new intertidal habitat on the western side of the peninsula, enhancing around 200 metres of Bow Creek. They also installed an artificial Otter holt and nesting banks for Kingfishers and Sand Martins.
- The London Legacy Development Corporation installed 200 metres of floating ecosystems, with mixed native wetland vegetation in the Lea Navigation north of the Bow Roundabout, extending the reed beds installed by Thames21 last year.
- The Lower Regents Coalition created wildflower meadows beside the Regent's canal at Ben Johnson Lock with help from Grounded Ecotherapy (see photo above). Low-nutrient substrate was spread over two areas, one on each side of the canal, then plugs and seed of appropriate wild flowers were planted. A few Silver Birch trees were planted. The project was funded by the Tower Hill Trust.
- Thames21 installed a 12-metre-long floating planter with mixed native wetland vegetation at the junction of Limehouse Cut and Lea Navigation (see front cover photo and page 9).

Projects planned for 2017/18

- The Council will install floating rafts along the eastern end of the Wapping Canal, creating 220m² of new reed bed and other wetland vegetation and enhancing habitats and water quality in 345 metres of canal.
- Phase 2 of the London City Island development (see page 5) will enhance a further 45 metres of Bow Creek's river wall with timber fendering to provide additional habitat for plants and invertebrates.
- Thames21 will install a floating ecosystem in the Limehouse Cut beside Bartlett Park.
- The Goodluck Hope development at the south end of the Leamouth Peninsula will create new intertidal terraces in the Thames and Bow Creek, along with timber cladding to provide additional habitat on the river walls, enhancing a total of around 320 metres of river. Nest tubes for Kingfishers and Sand Martins will also be installed.

Case study: a floating reed bed at Bow Locks



Volunteers planting a raft (Thames21)

Thames21 installed a floating planter into the Limehouse Cut, at its junction with the Lea Navigation, adjacent to Navigation Road in the Bow Locks area. This will provide habitats for fish, water birds and other wildlife, and will help to remediate water pollution. The 12-square-metre raft is planted with a mix of native wetland plants, including Lesser Pond-sedge, Purple Loosestrife, Water Mint, Yellow Iris, Common Club-rush and Reed Canary-grass.

The location was chosen from a list of sites throughout the Lower Lea valley by a public online vote as part of the "Love the Lea" Community Reedbeds project, funded by Thames Water.

Parks and open spaces



Chalk bank in Ackroyd Drive Green Link (Dan Hall/Friends of THCP)

Achievements in 2016/17

- The Council's Green Team created a new wild flower meadow in St George's Gardens in autumn 2017.
- The Friends of Meath Gardens planted 70 native trees, including two Black Poplars, in the Meath Gardens extension. Mowing was relaxed over the rest of the extension to Meath Gardens to create a meadow (see page 11).
- The Council's Green Team and Parks Service planted nectar-rich herbaceous perennials in beds in Albert Gardens, Mile End Park, St Anne's Churchyard and St George's Gardens, and in planters at entrances to Mile End Park.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park completed a new chalk bank in Railway Meadow in Cemetery Park (see photo above) and planted chalk-loving wild flowers and laid 115 metres of hedge near the main entrance.
- The Council's Green Team planted five Black Poplars in the winter of 2016-17 – three in Victoria Park and one each in All Saints Churchyard and Trinity Gardens.
- The Council's Parks Service planted bulbs to provide early spring nectar in Mile End Park (in Chris's Wood and King George's Fields) and at Stepney Green.
- Bird and bat boxes were installed in St George's Gardens, and bee boxes in Mile End Park.

Projects planned for 2017/18

- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will complete enhancement of woodland and grassland habitats in several areas of Cemetery Park, using crushed concrete to reduce soil fertility and planting 300 trees and shrubs and over 2500 wildflower plugs.
- The Council's Green Team will create new meadows in Poplar Recreation Ground and Meath Gardens in 2018.
- The Parks Service will plant 10,000 spring bulbs in Mile End Park, Stepney Green and other parks.
- The woodland walks and some overgrown meadow areas in Mile End Park will have crushed concrete spread to reduce fertility and improve them as habitats for wild flowers

Case study: new woodland and meadow in Meath Gardens



Volunteers at the community planting day (Friends of Meath Gardens)

The Friends of Meath Gardens, working with the Council's Green Team and Parks Rangers, organised a community planting day in March 2017 to plant 70 native trees donated by PAVEGEN. Over 50 volunteers showed up to plant the trees. The trees were planted in the strip of grassland between the path and the railway in the extension to the park which leads to the canal. When they mature, the trees will create a strip of woodland that will form a wildlife corridor, helping to link wooded habitats in Meath Gardens and Mile End Park and also acting as a screen for noise from the nearby railway. The trees included two Black Poplars, adding to the existing population of this rare native tree in Meath Gardens.

At the same time, it was agreed to relax the mowing of the grass on the other side of the path. This area, which sits on rubble and has low fertility, already contained a good diversity of wild flowers, so the relaxation of mowing has created an instant meadow.

Action plan promotion and monitoring



Setting a Hedgehog survey tunnel (Reece Heaven)

Achievements in 2016/17

- The Biodiversity Officer commented on around 180 planning applications during the year, ensuring that almost all of these will provide biodiversity enhancements.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park opened three new trails - the multimedia “Plants and People Trail”, a Heritage Trail, and “Let’s Get Lost”, a sound trail for iPhones.
- The Tower Habitats website has been updated onto new, easier-to-use and more reliable software, with a more modern look.
- Surveys undertaken by the Biodiversity Officer confirmed the presence of Great Crested Newts at Spitalfields City Farm, but failed to find any Hedgehogs at Mudchute (see page 13).
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park collaborated with top artists to create more wildlife murals on the railway arches beside Ackroyd Drive Green Link in spring 2017 (see photo on page 10).
- Huma Pearce of the London Bat Group left static bat detectors for a week in May 2017 at Millwall Park, Mile End Park (in the Ecology Park), Shadwell Basin and East India Dock Basin as part of a London-wide survey for the nationally scarce Nathusius’ Pipistrelle. These recorded Nathusius’ Pipistrelles at Mile End Park and Shadwell Basin. Common and Soprano Pipistrelles were also recorded from both these sites, with Noctule and Leisler’s Bat at Mile End Park. The Millwall Park and East India Dock Basin data are still being analysed. This was followed by a harp-trapping session in Victoria Park in September, when five Nathusius’ Pipistrelles were caught and ringed beside West Lake, along with three Common Pipistrelles.

Projects planned for 2017/18

- The Tower Hill Trust will continue to provide grants for schools and community groups for projects which contribute to LBAP objectives and targets.
- The Mudchute Association will provide interpretation signs along the new nature trail around the park and farm.

Case study: surveys of priority species during 2017



Cat footprints from a Hedgehog survey tunnel (John Archer)

Key surveys for protected and priority species were undertaken during 2017.

A population of crested newts has been thriving in the ponds at Spitalfields City Farm for 15 years or more, the result of an introduction to a nearby garden pond. However, as non-native Alpine Newts and European Tree Frogs, presumably from the same source, have also been seen at the farm, it was uncertain whether these were the strictly protected Great Crested Newt, or the very similar, non-native Italian Crested Newt. In April, the Biodiversity Officer took water samples from the ponds and sent them to Surescreen Scientifics Ltd to be analysed for environmental DNA (genetic material from newts which has spread into the water). This proved that the newts are native Great Crested Newts.

The Hedgehog has declined alarmingly in Tower Hamlets in recent years, with no confirmed reports since 2013. The south of the Isle of Dogs, around Mudchute, was considered to be a major stronghold for Hedgehogs a few years ago. In June, the Biodiversity Officer set ten baited footprint tunnels around Mudchute for five nights, checking them each morning. The tunnels have bait located on an inked pad, with sheets of paper on each side to record the footprints of any animal that enters the tunnel to get at the bait. This produced lots of footprints of cats (see photo above, and apologies to any local cat owners whose pets walked inky footprints into their house) and small rodents, but no Hedgehogs. According to Mammal Society survey guidelines, failure to record any Hedgehogs with ten tunnels set for five nights strongly indicates absence, so it seems Hedgehogs may be extinct on the Isle of Dogs, and perhaps in Tower Hamlets as a whole. If you see a Hedgehog in Tower Hamlets, please let the Biodiversity Officer know.

Progress against objectives and targets

Progress on all the enhancement objectives in the LBAP is summarised in Table 1 below. Objectives to maintain existing features are not included in the table. Any known losses of priority habitats will be reported separately.

Objectives are colour-coded as follows:

Green – projects identified to meet or exceed target

Yellow – projects identified to meet over 50% of target

Amber – projects identified to meet 10-49.9% of target

Red – projects identified to meet less than 10% of target

The same colour codes are used in the “% completed” column for completed projects.

Table 1: Progress towards LBAP targets, October 2017

Objective	Target	Units	Total completed	Total identified but not completed	Still to identify	% completed	% identified
Grassland enhanced	1.0	hectares	0.64	0.61	0	63.9	125.4
New meadow	1.0	hectares	0.31	0.64	0.05	31.3	95.1
New chalk meadow		hectares	0.104	0.13			
Restore chalk grassland	0.25	hectares	0	0.08	0.17	0.0	30.0
New Open Mosaic Habitat	1.00	hectares	0.45	5.29	0	45.0	573.9
Woodland enhanced	5.00	hectares	2.29	0.60	2.11	45.7	57.7
New native woodland	0.20	hectares	0.79	0.20	0	392.7	492.2
New orchard	0.50	hectares	0.18	0.23	0.16	23.4	68.9
New hedge	0.50	kilometres	0.27	1.80	0	53.8	414.5
River enhanced	0.20	kilometres	0.20	0.47	0	100.0	332.5
Canal enhanced	0.25	kilometres	0.63	0.75	0	251.6	550.8
Dock enhanced	5	sites	1	7	0	20.0	160.0
New pond	5	ponds	10	3	0	200.0	260.0
Reed bed enhanced	0.10	hectares	0.02	0	0.08	19.2	19.2
New reed bed	0.25	hectares	0.02	0.14	0.09	6.2	62
Bat box	20	sites	11	49	0	55.0	300.0
Night-scented plants		sites	5	8			

Objective	Target	Units	Total completed	Total identified but not completed	Still to identify	% completed	% identified
Hedgehog home		sites	2	1			
Otter holts	2	sites	1	0	1	50.0	50.0
Black redstart box	5	sites	1	17	0	20.0	360.0
Tern rafts	10	rafts	3	9	0	30.0	120.0
Artificial House Martin nests	5	sites	1	7	0	20.0	160.0
Sparrow terrace	20	sites	6	33	0	30.0	195.0
New dense climbers		sites	6	12			
Kingfisher bank	3	banks	3	5	0	100.0	266.7
Peregrine box	5	sites	0	3	2	0.0	60.0
Sand Martin bank	3	banks	1	4	0	33.3	166.7
Swift box	15	sites	2	36	0	13.3	253.3
Terrestrial habitat around pond		sites	4	5.000			
Eel pass	1	sites	0	0	1	0.0	0.0
Plant buckthorn	25	sites	9	11	5	36.0	80.0
Plant birdsfoot trefoil	10	sites	13	48	0	130.0	610.0
Plant nectar-rich flowers	50	sites	124	108	0	248.0	464.0
Bee box/insect hotel	20	sites	8	29	0	40.0	185.0
Loggery	15	sites	15	48	0	100.0	420.0
Plant black poplar	25	trees	17	6	2	68.0	92.0

Discussion

We are now two-thirds of the way through the implementation of the LBAP, and significant progress has been made towards almost all the targets, with over a quarter of them already achieved or surpassed.

The targets for new native woodland, canal enhancement, new ponds and planting nectar-rich flowers for pollinators have already been greatly exceeded, and those for river enhancement, kingfisher nest sites, loggeries and planting birdsfoot trefoil for the Common Blue butterfly have been achieved. For a further 12 objectives, projects have been identified which would achieve or exceed the target if they are all completed.

Projects to deliver at least half the total target have been identified for all but three objectives. That is less than 10% of the 31 objectives that have specific targets. There is still no clearly identified project to install an eel pass, though there has been some discussion around possible sites, including Old Ford Lock, Limehouse Basin and St Katharine's Docks. The best chance that an eel pass will be installed during the lifetime of the LBAP is if a planning application affecting one of the latter two sites can be used to fund this.

The other two targets for which less than 50% has been identified in projects are chalk grassland restoration and enhancement of existing reed beds. With the difficulty of restoring chalk grassland at Mudchute, and the restricted amount of existing reed bed in the borough, we may have to accept that these targets are too ambitious and are unlikely to be met. Nevertheless, working with relevant partners to encourage projects that contribute towards these objectives should remain a priority for the next two years.

Of the targets for which over 50% is covered by identified projects, there are five for which the figure is not much over 50%. Two of these, Peregrine boxes and another artificial Otter holt, are most likely to be delivered through developments. The other three are woodland enhancement, new orchards and new reed beds. Perhaps the highest priority for the remaining years of the LBAP should be working with partners to ensure these targets are achieved. Uncertainty still exists over the re-landscaping of Bartlett Park, which is expected to deliver a significant proportion of the target for new meadow. Until the detailed planting scheme is finalised, seeking other projects to ensure the meadow target is met should also be a priority.

There is inevitably still some uncertainty around the figures for projects that have been identified but not completed. There is, however, now greater clarity around the timescale of some of the major developments which are expected to deliver significant proportions of several targets. For the first time, the outcomes of one of these, the first phase of the London City Island development, appear in this report as having been delivered. Ongoing difficulties with monitoring progress of new developments, especially the many smaller developments which will contribute to LBAP targets, mean that some enhancements that have already been completed are currently still recorded as pending, and thus progress on many targets is probably ahead of the figures in Table 1.

Tower Habitats partners

A great many organisations and individuals have contributed to the development and delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, and together make up Tower Habitats, the biodiversity partnership for Tower Hamlets. They include Tower Hamlets Council, Approach Gardens, Bethnal Green Nature Reserve Trust, Cable Street Community Gardens, Canal & River Trust, Canary Wharf Group plc, Clarion Housing Group, EastendHomes, EcoSchemes, East London Business Alliance, Environment Agency, Friends of Mile End Park, Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Froglife, Gateway Housing Association, Grass Roof Company, Greening Brownfield Community Garden, Greenspace Information for Greater London, London Bat Group, London Beekeepers' Association, London Natural History Society, London Wildlife Trust, Lower Regents Coalition, Metropolitan Police, Mudchute Park & Farm, Nomad Projects Ltd, Peabody Housing Association, Poplar HARCA, Queen Mary University of London, Spitalfields City Farm, Stepney City Farm, Swift Conservation, Teesdale & Hollybush TRA, Thames21, Tower Hamlets Community Housing, Tower Hamlets Homes, Tower Hill Trust, Trees for Cities, Winterton House Organic Garden, Women's Environment Network and local residents.

Steering Group membership

The following people are members of the partnership's Steering Group at the time of publication of this report (January 2018):

John Archer (LBTH Biodiversity Officer, Chair)
John Swindells (local resident, Vice-Chair)
Klaudija Alasauskaite (Trees for Cities)
Derek Barclay (Clarion Housing Group)
Edward Buckton (LBTH Senior Arboricultural Officer)
Allan Cousens (local resident)
Sam Dundas-Dunbar (LBTH Clean & Green Volunteer Co-ordinator)
Ben Fenton (Thames21)
Tom Davis (Mudchute Association)
Ken Greenway (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)
Rory Harding (Trees for Cities)
Michael Hime (LBTH Green Team)
Matus Holecko (Tower Hamlets Homes)
Chris Horton (LBTH Infrastructure Team)
Abdul Khan (LBTH Service Manager, Energy & Sustainability)
Ellie Kuper Thomas (LB Tower Hamlets Strategic Planning)
Terry Lyle (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)
Nick Martin (Poplar HARCA)
Mohammed Raja (LBTH Parks)
Jonathan Taylor (LBTH Sustainable Development Team)
Matthew Twohig (LBTH Green Team)
Selina Uddin (East London Business Alliance)
Bob Watts (Gateway Housing Association)
Paul Wilson (EastendHomes)

The following additional people were members of the partnership's Steering Group during part or all of the period covered by this report: Lydia Davies, Harriet Peacock, PC Stephen Rodgers, Sri Sudhaker.

The Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Action Plan is led by the Biodiversity Officer in the Council's Sustainable Development Team. For more information contact John Archer (phone 020 7364 7478 or e-mail john.archer@towerhamlets.gov.uk)