

Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan



Annual Report 2012



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The Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) was adopted by the Council's Cabinet in September 2009. 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 back page of this report.

This report covers progress on delivering the LBAP for the 2011-12 financial year. It provides a summary of the main achievements during the year, and the priorities 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 management and monitoring of the plan.

Full details on progress against each action in the LBAP to the middle of March 2012 can be viewed on the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) at https://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/plans/lbap_plans.asp?LBAP=%7BB1E3BA17%2D42AB%2D4D6D%2D809F%2D94B05A862B48%7D&CO=



The wildlife pond at Mudchute (John Archer)

Front cover photo: Looking down on Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park (Friends of THCP)

Built environment



Green roofs at Canary Wharf (John Archer)

Achievements in 2011/12

- The majority of planning applications for new major developments in the borough include green roofs.
- The Managing Development planning policy document was published for consultation, including a policy seeking biodiversity enhancements including green roofs in all new developments.
- Three tours were organised in summer 2011 for planners and developers to see the green roofs and other biodiversity enhancements at Canary Wharf.
- Swift bricks and bat boxes are now installed as standard in new buildings by Gateway Housing Association.
- Swift boxes have been installed in the Tower of St Dunstan's Church (see case study overleaf).
- The first of the green roofs on the Eric and Treby Estates in Mile End have been fitted by East End Homes.
- The Biodiversity Officer has made comments on around 100 planning applications during the year.

Priorities for 2012-13

- Produce a planning guidance note on green roofs for developers, and continue to push for green roofs in new developments, and in particular seek more biodiverse roofs rather than sedum mats where possible.
- Provide more information on green roofs and design for biodiversity on the Tower Habitats website.
- Complete an implementation plan for the Green Grid and begin implementing key projects.
- Ensure the final Managing Development DPD, due for adoption in March 2013, contains strong policies to protect and enhance biodiversity and promote green roofs in new developments.

Case study: Swift boxes at St Dunstan's Church



St Dunstan's Church (John Archer)

Young volunteers from Stepney City Farm have installed nest boxes for swifts on St Dunstan's Church, Stepney. Working closely with the church warden, the 12-18 year olds designed the boxes and made them from spare plywood from the farm. The boxes were installed in the belfry windows on the north side of the historic church.

Swifts often nest in church towers, but access to the tower of St Dunstan's is blocked. It is hoped that the nest boxes will attract swifts back to the church. In spring 2012, they will try playing swift calls on a CD from the tower, as this is known to help attract swifts to new nest sites. Swift numbers have decreased in recent years, so projects such as this are important to try to reverse the decline.

For more information on swifts and how to help them, see The London's Swifts website www.londons-swifts.org.uk. You can help the RSPB monitor where swifts are nesting by sending in your sightings to the UK Swift Survey at www.rspb.org.uk/thingstodo/surveys/swifts/index.aspx.

The action plan for the built environment is led by Tower Hamlets Strategic Planning. For more information contact Manmohan Dayal (manmohan.dayal@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Gardens and grounds



Local children help with planting on Glamis Estate West (Trees for Cities)

Achievements in 2011/12

- A new wildlife-rich community garden created at St Leonard's Priory by Trees for Cities, the Diocese of London and Poplar HARCA. Pathways provide safe access and new gravel gardens, wildflower meadows, fruit trees and vegetable beds have been installed.
- Thames21 have continued to develop their community garden at Bow Locks, providing a range of wildlife habitats.
- Manorfield Primary School grounds work completed by Trees for Cities: the edible playground was extended, trees planted to create a natural boundary and support provided for staff and parents to develop their skills through a summer gardening club, class workshops, teacher training session and resource packs.
- 433 trees planted in February 2012 by Tower Hamlets Homes as part of the national Woodland Trust campaign.
- Glamis Adventure Playground transformed into a wildlife-friendly natural play area by Trees for Cities, planting 22 trees and a large number of flowering & fruiting plants.
- Community gardens transformed in Glamis Estate West, by Trees for Cities with EastendHomes, with over a thousand perennials and eight trees planted.
- An urban nature trail installed by Trees for Cities on the Manchester Estate (see case study overleaf)
- Six orchards created on housing estates by Tower Hamlets Homes and one by EastendHomes.

Priorities for 2012-13

- Provide grants for school grounds improvements and wildlife-friendly community gardens
- Enhance biodiversity in green spaces in Tower Hamlets Community Housing's Mansfield and Aveley East Estate
- Enhance school grounds at Bygrove, St Paul's Primary and Lansbury Lawrence Schools

Case study: Manchester Estate urban nature trail



One of the nature trail posts on the Manchester Estate (Trees for Cities)

Trees for Cities, in partnership with EastendHomes and local residents, have been transforming the green spaces around Manchester Estate on the Isle of Dogs to create an oasis for birds, insects and mammals. This has led to the opening of the first Manchester Estate urban nature trail, developed through working closely with the young people on the estate and with children from local schools.

Over the last three years, four community gardens have been developed around the estate, with a natural play area, tree planting and new wildlife habitats, including a wildflower meadow and woodland copse. A hedgehog home has been installed. Trees for Cities has also run green skills workshops for residents to ensure they can continue to get involved in the planting on their estate.

The Manchester Estate Urban Nature Trail will help residents discover the wildlife on their doorstep and provide tips on how to keep it there. The trail covers wildlife on the estate such as butterflies, bees, beetles, hedgehogs, toads and birds as well as the habitats they live in and plants they feed on across the estate. There is also a leaflet which accompanies the trail with lots of interesting information.

The action plan for gardens and grounds is led by Tower Hamlets Homes. For more information contact Clare Matheson (clare.matheson@towerhamletshomes.org.uk)

Rivers and standing water



The floating reed bed at Canary Wharf (John Archer/LBTH)

Achievements in 2011/12

- Thames21 held nine River Clean workdays during the year, where over 300 people picked litter from the Thames foreshore.
- The two lakes in Victoria Park have been drained, de-silted and refilled with water from a borehole. East Lake has been enlarged, with a new island (see case study on page 10).
- Two small populations of the seriously invasive Floating Pennywort in the Regent's Canal have been eradicated by British Waterways.
- 50m of new reed bed and 90m of soft bank protection have been installed by British Waterways in the Lea Navigation, with a further 190m of reed bed planned for spring 2012.
- A new pond was created at Phoenix School by Thames21, with funding from Tower Hamlets Council (see case study overleaf).
- Three workdays, attended by a total of 23 volunteers, have been run by Thames21 to remove invasive species from the Lea system.
- Over 250 children from 5 schools enjoyed Thames21's Sticklebacks in the Classroom project.
- Canary Wharf Management Ltd restored the floating reed bed and re-launched it in West India Middle Dock. It has already attracted a good variety of water birds.

Priorities for 2012-13

- Clean and enhance waterways throughout the borough through Thames21's Big Waterway Cleanup.
- Continue to address invasive species on the River Lea and other waterways in Tower Hamlets in a co-ordinated way, with training for volunteers provided by Thames21.
- Seek funding for de-silting of East India Dock Basin.
- Eradicate New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) in the ecology pond at Mile End Park
- Seek funding for reed beds along much of the length of the Lea Navigation.
- Create an amphibian pond in the children's garden in Mile End Park play centre.

Case study: A new pond at Phoenix Special School



Young volunteers at Phoenix School with a coir planter ready for the pond (Thames21)

With funding from Tower Hamlets Council, Thames21 have installed a pond in the garden at Phoenix School in Bow, a school for children with special educational needs. The pond had to meet rigorous safety requirements, as well as providing an attractive educational resource for the school, and of course it had to provide habitat for wetland wildlife too. The biggest design issue was a cover which would prevent children from falling in but allow aquatic insects and amphibians to get in and out. Thames21's regular volunteers dug the hole and fitted the liner, and the school children helped prepare and plant rolls of coir which were installed to provide emergent vegetation.

The action plan for rivers and standing water is led by Thames21. For more information contact Theo Thomas (theo.thomas@thames21.org.uk)

Parks and open spaces



Pond-dipping during Creepy Crawly Week (Mile End Park Ranger Service)

Achievements in 2011/12

- Over 5 hectares of new wild flower meadow were created in Victoria Park.
- Young Black Poplars were planted in Poplar Park and Victoria Park to commemorate Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.
- Large numbers of birch seedlings have been planted on the Green Bridge in Mile End Park.
- Wildflower seeds have been planted to create a wildflower meadow at the King George's Fields in Mile End Park.
- Hedgerows have been planted in the fenced green area of the Ecology Park and Wennington Green off Roman Road. Hedgerows have also been planted within the fenced area on the greenery of Kirks Place in Mile End Park, just off Rhodeswell Road.
- The annual Creepy Crawly Week in Mile End Park in May 2011 attracted schools from across the borough, with rangers delivering a range of fun ecology-based activities such as sweep netting, pond dipping, bat walking, and various arts and crafts related activities.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park won the Community Award, for the most successful project inspired, driven and delivered by a local community, at the Mayor of London's 2011 RE:LEAF Awards.
- Bi-monthly "Bird Barmy Army" walks and Junior Wildlife Club were held in Victoria Park throughout the year.

Priorities for 2012-13

- Complete the restoration of Victoria Park and ensure maximum benefits for biodiversity.
- Deliver significant biodiversity enhancements in Millwall Park.
- Undertake reptile surveys in Mile End Park, Mudchute Park and Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.
- Explore possibilities for planting Black Poplars in parks throughout the borough.
- Annual Creepy Crawly week scheduled for May 28th - 1st June 2012. Rangers deliver a range of fun ecology based activities such as sweep netting, pond dipping, bat walking, and various arts and crafts related activities.
- Develop a selection of pictorial meadows across the Green Flag sites.

Case study: the Victoria Park Project



Restoring and extending Victoria Park's East Lake (John Archer/LBTH)

Victoria Park is undergoing major restoration and improvement, thanks to £12 million funding from the Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery Funds. Much of this is seeking to restore elements of the landscape and historic structures, and provide a new visitor hub in the east of the park. The opportunity has also been taken to ensure that the park's biodiversity benefits from the works. Both lakes have been de-silted and restored, and East Lake has been extended with a new island. Marginal planting and management of vegetation on the islands in West Lake will improve the habitat for water birds and amphibians, and native fish will be established in East Lake. Over five hectares of wildflower meadows have been sown around the edges of the eastern half of the park; this is five times the target for meadow creation in parks in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The work is continuing into 2012-13, and further biodiversity enhancements are planned, including native woodland planting.

The action plan for parks and open spaces is led by Tower Hamlets Parks Service. For more information contact Katherine O'Brien (katherine.o'brien@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Action plan management and monitoring



Botanical survey in Victoria Park (John Archer/LBTH)

Achievements in 2011/12

- Biodiversity Officer became a permanent, full-time post in November 2011
- Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation reviewed (see case study overleaf)
- Public wildlife survey of bats, hedgehogs, stag beetles, house sparrows and frogs launched. This was designed and is hosted by Greenspace Information for Greater London, the environmental records centre. See www.gigl.org.uk/Submitrecords/TowerHamlets/tabid/115/Default.aspx
- Tower Habitats website continues to develop, with regular news and events and daily updates of latest wildlife reports
- 1650 species records were sent to Greenspace Information for Greater London, the environmental records centre, to input into its database.



Violet Carpenter Bee, Canal Club garden, September 2011 (Sally Hone)

Priorities for 2012-13

- Publish an article in East End Life in spring 2012 to raise the profile of biodiversity in Tower Hamlets generally, and the public survey, wildlife gardening pack and Tower Habitats website in particular.
- Hold a conference in summer 2012 to mark the half way stage in the 5-year life of the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Continue to update and develop the Tower Habitats website

Case study: Review of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation



Wapping Wood, one of the new SINC's identified in the review (John Archer)

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC's) are places which are especially valuable for wildlife. They are identified using procedures and criteria defined by the Mayor of London, and receive protection from development through planning policies in the Council's Local Development Framework. It is vital to review SINC's every few years to ensure the right sites are protected. SINC's in Tower Hamlets were reviewed in 2011. The Council's Biodiversity Officer surveyed all the current SINC's and a number of other sites which were thought to be potential new SINC's. After consultation with the Biodiversity Partnership and other stakeholders, a number of changes to SINC's were agreed. King Edward Memorial Park, Wapping Wood, the Wapping Canals and Saffron Avenue Pond were identified as new SINC's, and Shadwell Basin and Weavers Fields were upgraded from local to Borough Importance. Several sites which should probably never have been SINC's in the first place were removed from the list of SINC's, to ensure that only sites which meet the criteria are identified. The new SINC's have been published on the Local Development Framework proposals map.

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 john.archer@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

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, Canary Wharf Group plc, EastendHomes, EcoSchemes, Environment Agency, Friends of Mile End Park, Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Froglife, Gateway Housing Association, Grass Roof Company, Greenspace Information for Greater London, London Wildlife Trust, Mudchute Park & Farm, Poplar HARCA, Queen Mary University of London, Spitalfields City Farm, Stepney City Farm, Thames21, Tower Hamlets Community Housing, Tower Hamlets Homes, Trees for Cities, and local residents.

Steering Group membership

The following people were members of the partnership's Steering Group during the period covered by this report:

Halim Abdul (LBTH Sustainable Development Team, Secretary)
John Archer (LBTH Biodiversity Officer, Chair)
Derek Barclay (Poplar HARCA)
Allan Cousens (local resident)
Manmohan Dayal (LBTH Strategic Planning)
Ken Greenway (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)
Abdul Khan (LBTH Sustainable Development Manager)
Terry Lyle (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)
Roy MacPepple (Tower Hamlets Homes, Vice-Chair)
Katherine O'Brien (LBTH Parks)
Sandy Pahl (Gateway Housing Association)
Mohammed Raja (LBTH Parks)
Katie Roberts (Trees for Cities)
Michael Rowan (LBTH Parks)
Rita Serra (Thames21)
John Swindells (local resident)