

# Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan

## Annual Report 2013



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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 2012-13 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 can be viewed on the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) at <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/project/show/36447>

The Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Partnership wishes to record its sincere thanks to Michael Rowan, Director of Mile End Park and then Head of Parks, who left Tower Hamlets in March 2013. Michel's contribution to biodiversity conservation in the borough has been enormous, and he will be missed.



Michael Rowan leading a walk in Mile End Park (Mohammed Raja)

Front cover photo: A volunteer gets stuck into removing invasive species (Thames21)



## Built environment



The green roof on the Soanes Centre (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)

### Achievements in 2012/13

- The majority of planning applications for new major developments in the borough continue to include green roofs.
- The Council planted over 200 street trees, many of which are native or berry-bearing species.
- A seminar for planners and a presentation to social housing providers on sustainable urban drainage systems, including rain gardens and living roofs, were held in summer 2012.
- Seven rain gardens have been installed as sustainable urban drainage systems along Bethnal Green Road (see box overleaf).
- The Managing Development Document was discussed at an Examination in Public. The policy seeking biodiversity enhancements including green roofs in all new developments was accepted by the Inspector and the document was adopted by Full Council in April 2013, along with a new Proposals Map that includes the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation reviewed in 2011.
- Greenspace Information for Greater London, working with livingroofs.org, has mapped all known green roofs in the borough.
- The information on green roofs and design for biodiversity on the Tower Habitats website was updated and expanded <http://www.towerhabitats.org/resources/building-for-biodiversity.htm>.
- The Biodiversity Officer has made comments on over 100 planning applications during the year.

## Priorities for 2013/14

- Complete a planning guidance note on sustainable urban drainage, including green roofs
- Ensure that more green roofs in new developments are biodiverse roofs rather than simple sedum mats.
- Establish a process for recording green roofs in new developments.

### Case study: Bethnal Green Road sustainable urban drainage



Map of the Bethnal Green Road rain gardens (Green Roof Consultancy)

Tower Hamlets Council's Highways section, with advice from the Green Roof Consultancy, has installed seven rain gardens (five of them shown on the map above) as sustainable urban drainage systems along Bethnal Green Road. The gardens are designed to hold water at times of heavy rainfall, so that the water is slowly absorbed into the ground. This reduces runoff into the drains, and hence reduces the likelihood of flooding. It also provides an ideal place to create small wetland habitats for wildlife. The rain gardens on Bethnal Green Road have been planted with the wet-loving native trees and shrubs Alder, Guelder-rose and Dogwood, with wild flowers beneath including Dog-violet, Bluebell and Snowdrop, along with native ferns and ivy.

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](mailto:manmohan.dayal@towerhamlets.gov.uk))

## Gardens and grounds



The wildflower seed packs were attached to this promotional post card

### Achievements in 2012/13

- The Council provided 2000 packs of free wildflower seeds to schools, community groups and residents.
- EastendHomes created a Bee Garden on Eric Street, with advice from the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. The garden contains a wide variety of nectar-rich flowers, which will provide food for bees throughout the year.
- Trees for Cities planted 46 fruit trees to create a community orchard on the St George's Estate. The trees included different varieties of apple, plum, cherry and pear, all of which are good for invertebrates.
- Biodiversity enhancements at Lansbury Lawrence School (see below), Hermitage Primary School, Lawdale Junior School, St Mary & St Michael Primary School and Cranbrook Community Garden were funded by £500 grants from Tower Hamlets Homes.
- EastendHomes created a new community garden on Elf Green, in the Glamis Estate (see box overleaf).
- Tower Hamlets Homes installed nest boxes and bat boxes on their estates. Each of the 27 neighbourhoods received a standard hole-fronted box, an open-fronted box and a sparrow terrace, and four bat boxes were placed in locations likely to be used by bats.
- Trees for Cities created "edible playgrounds" in Lansbury Lawrence and St Paul's Schools, using trees and other planting to encourage healthy eating, creative play and outdoor learning, as well as helping local wildlife.



## Priorities for 2013/14

- Continue to provide grants for school grounds improvements and wildlife-friendly community gardens. Grants awarded in 2012 will produce biodiversity enhancements at Old Church Nursery School, Phoenix School, Stebon Primary School, Virginia School and the Approach Estate.
- Tower Hamlets Homes wants to install hedgehog homes on two estates if estates can be found where hedgehogs still occur.
- Further enhancements on St George's Estate.

### Case study: Elf Green



Mayor Lutfur Rahman helps local volunteers to plant a tree on Elf Green (Trees for Cities)

EastendHomes, with help from Trees for Cities and local residents, have created a new community garden on Elf Green in the Glamis Estate. The centrepiece of the garden is a wildflower meadow. Topsoil was scraped from an area in the middle of the green to reveal the less fertile subsoil, with the topsoil made into a mound beside the scrape. Both mound and scrape were sown with a wildflower seed mix, containing cornfield annuals and perennial meadow plants. The mound is already (in spring 2013) a mass of annuals, which will provide a colourful display in the summer. Plants are growing more slowly on the scrape, but the low nutrients here should help a diverse meadow to develop in the long term.

In addition to the meadow, bulbs and woodland wild flowers have been planted in a shady corner, flower beds full of nectar-rich perennials have been created, and new trees have been planted. Much of the work was completed on a Community Planting Day in February 2013, attended by over 50 people (see photo above).

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

## Rivers and standing water



Volunteers in the Big Balsam Bash, part of the Big Waterway Clean Up (photo: Thames21)

### **Achievements in 2012/13**

- The Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways) planted a further 190 metres of reed bed in the Lea Navigation in spring 2012, following work undertaken there last year, and also planted 100 metres of new reed bed in gabion baskets along the Limehouse Cut south of Bow Common Lane
- Thames21 ran the Big Waterway Clean Up 2012, removing rubbish and invasive species from the Lea system and other waterways in the Olympic boroughs and creating two waterside meadows in Tower Hamlets (see box overleaf).
- A pond designed for amphibians was created in the children's garden in Mile End Park play centre.
- Thames 21 worked with Phoenix School to renovate Coburn Community Pond off Bow Road. In 2012 volunteers emptied the pond and removed its liner, and the school carried out further renovation works. Volunteers returned in spring 2013 to plant up the pond. Aquatic plants were planted in small coir rolls and submerged in the pond.
- Native fish, including Tench, Roach, Perch, Gudgeon, Bream and Chub, were stocked into the newly-extended East Lake in Victoria Park.

## Priorities for 2012/13

- Create or restore at least two amphibian ponds at Mudchute Park and run a training course on amphibian surveying as part of Froglife's Dragon Finder project.
- Continue to seek funding for de-silting of East India Dock Basin.
- Eradicate New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) in the ecology pond at Mile End Park
- Continue to seek funding for reed beds along much of the length of the Lea Navigation and Limehouse Cut.

### Case study: The Big Waterway Clean Up 2012



Volunteers took to canoes to reach some of the worksites (photo: Thames21)

The Big Waterways Clean Up 2012 was a Thames21 campaign to enhance the waterways of London in preparation for, and as a legacy of, the London 2012 Olympic Games. Events ran from February to December 2012; with a range of exciting events every week on waterways in the London 2012 host boroughs. In total, 4667 volunteers took part in tasks on 80 sites, many of them in Tower Hamlets, with many sites getting multiple visits. They cleaned up the waterways, often using canoes, as well as planting 12 wildflower meadows and managing invasive species that threaten the waterways.

The Big Waterways Clean Up 2012 also trained up 60 event leaders, who are now qualified to run their own events. Many of them now lead adoption groups who keep sections of the waterways clean.

The waterway wildflower meadows are a legacy of the campaign. Two meadows were planted beside the Lea Navigation in Tower Hamlets: one by White Post Lane and the other beside Bow Flyover.

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



## Parks and open spaces



Learning about invertebrates in Mile End Park (Mohammed Raja)

### Achievements in 2012/13

- The grassland and woodland in Millwall Park was significantly improved for wildlife (see box overleaf).
- The Parks Service delivered plenty of wildlife-based community events, including the annual Creepy Crawly Week in Mile End Park, bi-monthly “Bird Barmy Army” walks and Junior Wildlife Club in Victoria Park throughout the year, and a Fungus Foray in Victoria Park.
- A new low-growing meadow has been planted in Island Gardens, along with woodland wildflowers and bulbs under the trees on the north side.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park had a busy year, with about 120 public wildlife-related events including guided walks, weekly practical conservation volunteering, green woodworking, Bow Beasties junior wildlife club, wild food events, bat walks and a fungus foray.
- Trees for Cities designed a Victoria Park Tree Trail with an accompanying leaflet.
- Four beehives were installed in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park in June 2012 and have been the basis of a training course.
- Mudchute has revamped its website <http://www.mudchute.org/> with new wildlife pages, a blog which includes monthly information on what wildlife to look out for, and a photo gallery on Flickr <http://www.flickr.com/groups/2046249@N22/pool/>
- A beehive has been installed at Mile End Park in the Arts Park. The bees will be the focus of curriculum projects with young people, in partnership with the Council’s Youth Offending Team.

## Priorities for 2013/14

- Plant at least 15 Black Poplars in parks throughout the borough.
- Ensure that capital schemes in Bartlett Park, Albert Gardens, Mile End Park and St George's Gardens include biodiversity enhancements.
- The Parks Service will continue to run community wildlife events in Victoria and Mile End Parks, and deliver at least three events in other Council-run parks.
- Create a new community orchard at Mudchute.
- Run a programme of biodiversity events at Mudchute, including a dawn chorus, summer wildlife day and fungus foray.

### Case study: Millwall Park wildlife enhancements



Volunteers from New York Stock Exchange at work in Millwall Park (Friends of THCP)

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park designed and implemented habitat enhancements to the grassland and woodland in Millwall Park. 1.45 hectares of grassland were improved by sowing wildflower seed, planting plugs and bulbs, dressing with sand and removing invasive species, and 1800 square metres of woodland enhanced by planting bulbs and wild flowers, selective thinning and removal of stakes and guards. About 17,000 bulbs and 7000 wildflower plugs were planted. Key parts of the practical work was undertaken by Grounded Ecotherapy, a mental health and wellbeing project aimed at working with homeless and ex-homeless adults, part of Providence Row Housing Association. Also, 16 volunteer events were attended by 225 volunteers, and three training courses were held. The project was funded through Section 106 money from a nearby development.

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](mailto:katherine.o'brien@towerhamlets.gov.uk))



## Action plan management and monitoring



Professor Goode photographs flowers in Mile End Park (Mohammed Raja)

### Achievements in 2012/13

- A conference was held in June 2012 to mark the half way stage in the 5-year life of the Biodiversity Action Plan (see box 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](http://www.gigl.org.uk/Submitrecords/TowerHamlets/tabid/115/Default.aspx)
- The Tower Habitats website continues to develop, with 33 news items during the year, regular details of events, and daily updates of wildlife reports.
- 130 species records were sent to Greenspace Information for Greater London, the environmental records centre, to input into its database.
- An article was published in East End Life in spring 2012 to raise the profile of biodiversity in Tower Hamlets generally, and the public survey, wildlife gardening pack, free seeds and Tower Habitats website in particular.
- Two new butterfly species for the borough were recorded during the year. A Long-tailed Blue (a very rare visitor to Britain) was seen at East India Dock Basin, and a White-letter Hairstreak at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. The latter was one of 22 species of butterflies recorded in Cemetery Park during the year, despite the poor weather. This reflects the great deal of conservation work aimed at butterflies which has been undertaken there over many years.

## Priorities for 2013/14

- Continue to update and develop the Tower Habitats website
- Create and keep updated a Calendar of Wildlife Events in Tower Hamlets
- Transfer the actions in the Biodiversity Action Plan onto the new BARS2 database
- Publicise the need for Hedgehog records as widely as possible
- Prepare for review of the Biodiversity Action Plan in 2014

### Case study: Biodiversity Conference



Professor David Goode addresses delegates (Ismail Saray 2012©[www.artzone.coop](http://www.artzone.coop))

Local wildlife and biodiversity issues were explored at a free conference, 'Biodiversity: From Balcony to Building Site and Beyond', organised by Tower Hamlets Council on 27 June 2012. The conference attracted an audience of nearly 100 people, including representatives of many Council departments, social housing providers, consultants, local and London-wide community and environmental groups, and local residents. Speakers at the event included Professor David Goode, who talked about the history of nature conservation in the borough, and put the borough's wildlife in a wider London context. Katie Roberts from Trees for Cities talked about the fantastic work they've been doing to transform schools and housing estates in the borough to make them better for wildlife and more exciting for people. Theo Thomas from Thames21 talked about the Big Waterways Clean Up 2012 (see box on page 8). Gary Grant, an ecological consultant who has worked all over the world on projects involving sustainable urban design, talked about how design of buildings and the spaces around them can benefit biodiversity and reduce water use at the same time. Parks Manager Michael Rowan talked about his vision for Mile End and Victoria Parks, and Katherine O'Brien, Environment Manager in Parks, presented the annual report on the Biodiversity Action Plan. The event was closed with a tour of Mile End Park. A number of local and Londonwide community and environmental groups brought stalls and displays to the conference.

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](mailto: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:

John Archer (LBTH Biodiversity Officer, Chair)  
John Swindells (local resident, Vice-Chair)  
Halim Abdul (LBTH Sustainable Development Team, Secretary)  
Allan Cousens (local resident)  
Manmohan Dayal (LBTH Strategic Planning)  
Nick Golson (Mudchute Association)  
Ken Greenway (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)  
Abdul Khan (LBTH Sustainable Development Manager)  
Terry Lyle (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)  
Clare Matheson (Tower Hamlets Homes)  
Katherine O'Brien (LBTH Parks)  
Sandy Pahl (Gateway Housing Association)  
Mohammed Raja (LBTH Parks)  
Katie Roberts (Trees for Cities)  
Michael Rowan (LBTH Parks)  
Theo Thomas (Thames21)