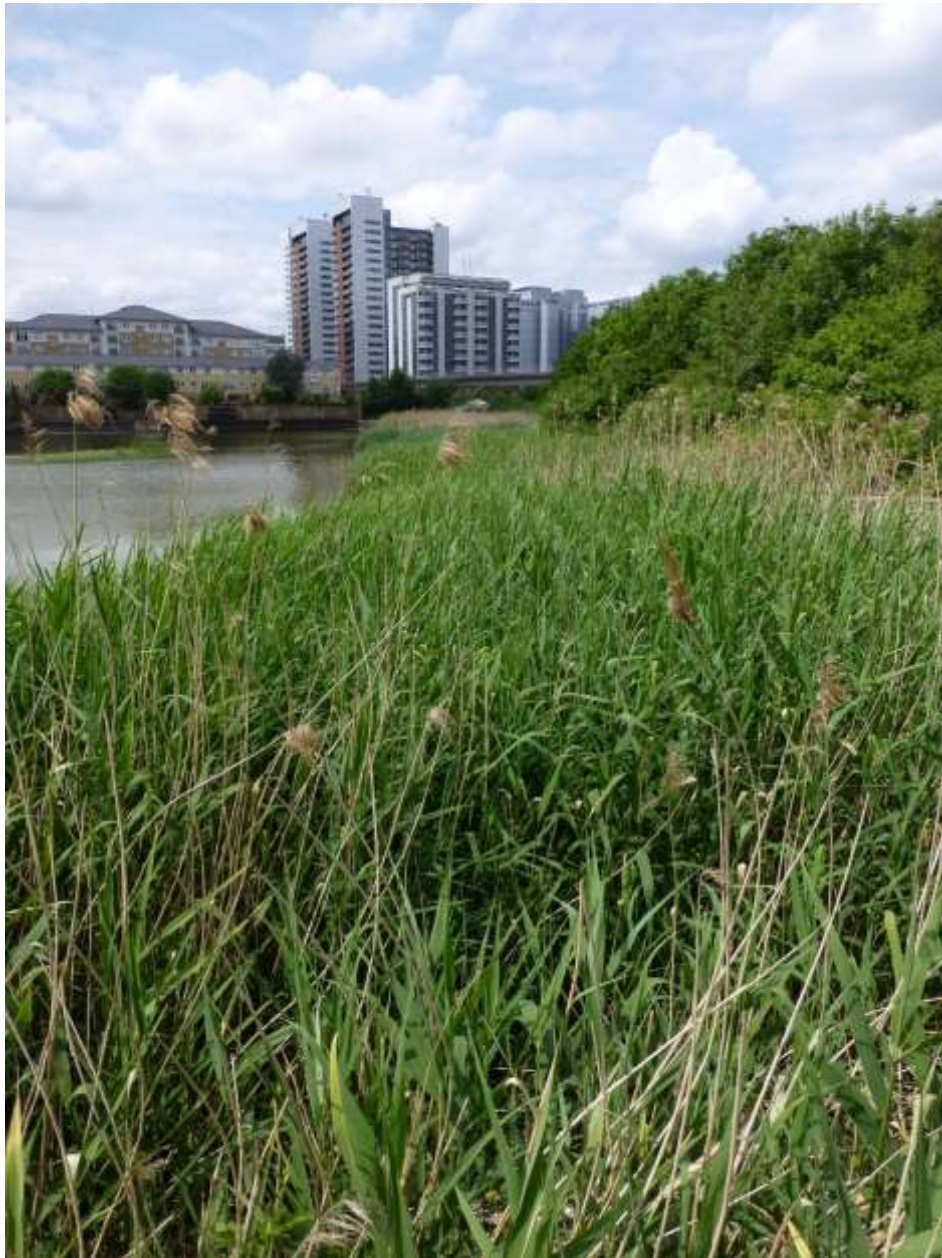


Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Annual Report 2014



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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 2013-14 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 actions in the Plan can be viewed on the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) at <http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/project/show/36447>



Winterton House Organic Garden (John Archer)

Front cover photo: East India Dock Basin (John Archer)

Built environment



Derbyshire Street Pocket Park (Jessica Bastock)

Achievements in 2013/14

- The Council's Highways section introduced wildflower turf along parts of Grundy Street and Bygrove Street.
- The majority of planning applications for new major developments in the borough continue to include green roofs, and an increasing proportion of these are biodiverse roofs.
- The Biodiversity Officer has made comments on over 130 planning issues during the year.
- A new pocket park was created at the end of Derbyshire Street (see photo above and box overleaf).
- Canary Wharf Management Ltd installed a green roof on the new building at 25-30 Churchill Place, and bird boxes were placed there.

Priorities for 2014/15

- Commission guidance on green infrastructure in new housing developments
- Ensure the Wood Wharf development includes significant areas of biodiverse roofs
- Install wildflower turf along parts of Bethnal Green Road and Westferry Road
- Increase the amount of nectar-rich plants on the Canary Wharf estate

Case study: Derbyshire Street Pocket Park



Gabion benches provide habitat for invertebrates (Jessica Bastock)

With funding from the Mayor of London's Pocket Parks scheme, the Council created a new pocket park at the end of Derbyshire Street, between Oxford House and Weavers Fields. The short eastern section of the street, which served little purpose except for car parking, was closed and landscaped in November 2013. The landscaping includes plenty of native and wildlife-friendly plants, such as *Salvias*, *Verbena bonariensis*, dogwood, common sedge, *Heuchera* 'palace purple', periwinkle, lavender and clematis, as well as fruit trees and herbs, which are an excellent source of nectar for bees and other pollinating insects. Habitat panels were installed along a green roof cycle shelter made of recycled materials; these panels provide nesting sites for mining bees and other insects. The park also contains gabion benches filled with recycled granite sets from the site, which provide small niches for insects to live in.

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



Building an insect hotel at Matilda House (John Archer)

Achievements in 2013/14

- The Council provided almost 1000 packs of free wildflower seeds to schools, community groups and residents.
- Tower Hamlets Homes installed an insect hotel at Matilda House, with help from local residents (see photo above).
- Coppicing and other tree works were undertaken at Bethnal Green Nature Reserve to enhance habitats and ensure safety.
- EastendHomes, with help from Trees for Cities, planted an orchard in the Swedenborg Square (see box overleaf).
- Zander Court Community Garden Club created a new garden full of nectar-rich plants on top of an underground car park at Elver Gardens.
- Phytology, a project to grow and promote native wild flowers with medicinal properties, was established at Bethnal Green Nature Reserve. Led by arts group Nomad, the project will run throughout 2014, increasing access to the nature reserve.
- A new community garden, planted to attract bees and other pollinating insects, was created in Lark Row, on an area used for illegal parking and fly-tipping. The garden is now maintained by Pritchard's Road Day Centre.
- An insect hotel was installed and fruit trees planted at Bate Street Open Space with the help of school children from Cyril Jackson Primary School, as part of a project to deter anti-social behaviour within the space.
- A loggery was installed and wildflower seeds planted at John Smith Day Nursery.

Priorities for 2014/15

- Continue to provide grants for school grounds improvements and wildlife-friendly community gardens. Grants awarded in 2013 will produce biodiversity enhancements at Approach Gardens, Globe Community Food Garden, St Peter's Bethnal Green churchyard and Osmani Primary School.
- Create a new wildflower meadow in the Swedenborg Estate
- Create four new wildflower meadows in the Lincoln and Teviot Estates
- Work with the London Orchard Project to find a suitable site and plant a community orchard on Poplar Harca's estates

Case study: Swedenborg Square Orchard



Swedenborg Square Orchard (Paul Wilson)

EastendHomes, with help from Trees for Cities and local residents, have created a wonderful new orchard in the Swedenborg Estate. Over 40 fruit trees, including apples, pear and cherries, were planted in rows in February 2013. Then in the autumn of 2013, strips of turf were removed between the rows, rotavated and sown with cornfield annuals. These produced a spectacular display of colourful flowers in summer 2014, attracting lots of bees and other pollinating insects. The design by Trees for Cities also ensured that the orchard looks great for residents looking down from surrounding blocks.

The wildflower strips will be scythed in late summer, and volunteers will help to spread any remaining seeds before the arisings are removed for composting.

The action plan for gardens and grounds is led by Tower Hamlets Homes. For more information contact Andy Clark (andy.clark@towerhamletshomes.org.uk)

Rivers and standing water



Vegetated rafts in Limehouse Basin (John Archer)

Achievements in 2013/14

- Froglife created a series of new and restored ponds at Mudchute (see box overleaf).
- A new wildlife pond was created at Virginia Primary School with the help of Froglife and a biodiversity grant from Tower Hamlets Homes.
- The Canal & River Trust installed vegetated rafts in Limehouse Basin and Poplar Dock Marina to mitigate any disturbance to bird habitats caused by increasing residential moorings (see photo above).
- A new wildlife pond was created at Winterton House Organic Garden.
- As the first stage of Project Reedbed, part of the Fixing Broken Rivers project, Thames21 completed a survey of reed beds in the Lea Navigation and identified sites where new reed beds could be created.
- The pond in the Harley Grove Joint Venture Garden was restored by Phoenix School, with assistance from Thames21 volunteers and a biodiversity grant from Tower Hamlets Homes.

Priorities for 2014/15

- Create reed beds and other habitat enhancements in the Regent's Canal opposite the Ragged School Museum
- Ensure the Wood Wharf development includes significant enhancements to habitats in the docks
- 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
- Provide training on Great Crested Newts for Spitalfields Farm staff and volunteers so they can get an educational licence to handle Crested Newts to enable pond-dipping

Case study: Mudchute ponds



Digging a new pond at Mudchute (John Archer)

Reptile and amphibian conservation charity Froglife created some wonderful new wetland habitat in the Lower Field at Mudchute in autumn 2013, as part of the Dragon Finder project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. An old, leaky pond to the north of the main wildlife pond was restored and re-lined, and a series of new ponds created to the south of the main pond. These are connected by a shallow, lined wetland area which floods in winter to create one large pond, but is exposed in summer to leave three separate ponds. Selective tree works were undertaken on the slope to the east of the ponds to let more light reach the water. To enable visiting school groups to pond-dip safely without damaging the habitats, the Council added a pond-dipping platform between the northern two ponds. Large numbers of Smooth Newts have been seen in all the ponds this year.

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



The new dead hedge at Mudchute (Justine Aw)

Achievements in 2013/14

- The London Orchard Project planted a new community orchard at Mudchute with the help of local schools.
- The Parks Service, Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park and Mudchute delivered plenty of wildlife-based community events, including bi-monthly “Bird Barmy Army” walks and Junior Wildlife Club in Victoria Park throughout the year, Bow Beasties Watch Club, monthly guided walks and a Fungus Foray in Cemetery Park, and a dawn chorus walk and Go Wild Day at Mudchute.
- Scrub and coarse herbaceous vegetation was removed from the southern bank at Mudchute as the first step in restoring grassland (see box overleaf).
- 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.
- A dead hedge and loggery were constructed by volunteers at Mudchute to create new dead wood habitats for invertebrates (see photo above).
- Five Black Poplars were planted in parks in Poplar, the district which is named after the tree. The Mayor planted one in Trinity Gardens, and four more were planted in Poplar Recreation ground.

Priorities for 2014/15

- Plant at least 15 Black Poplars in parks throughout the borough
- Ensure that the restoration of Bartlett Park includes biodiversity enhancements, such as meadows and hedgerows
- Improve habitats in the woodland at Weavers Fields
- Create cornfield annual strips and plant spring bulbs in Altab Ali Park
- The Parks Service will continue to run community wildlife events in Victoria and Mile End Parks
- Run a programme of biodiversity events at Mudchute, including a dawn chorus and summer wildlife day

Case study: grassland restoration at Mudchute



Restored grassland on the south bank of Mudchute (John Archer)

In winter 2013-14, the Council funded the removal of scrub, small trees, brambles and coarse herbaceous vegetation from the southern slope of Mudchute, facing Millwall Park. This used to be superb flower-rich grassland, teeming with butterflies and other invertebrates, but has declined over the last ten years or so due to lack of management. This is the first stage in restoring this grassland. Fencing is now being installed and grazing will be introduced, to prevent the coarse vegetation re-growing, and to encourage a diverse plant community. If successful, this could be repeated elsewhere at Mudchute to return its grasslands to their former glories.

The action plan for parks and open spaces is led by Tower Hamlets Parks Service. For more information contact Mohammed Raja (mohammed.raja@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Action plan management and monitoring



Cable Street Community Garden – best community wildlife garden (Mohammed Raja)

Achievements in 2013/14

- A calendar of wildlife events in Tower Hamlets was created and kept up to date. This was available on the Tower Habitats website and circulated quarterly with the newsletter.
- All the actions in the LBAP were transferred to the new version of the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS2).
- A successful application was made to the London Wildlife Sites Board to upgrade Mile End Park to a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (see box overleaf).
- The Tower Habitats website continues to develop, with 24 news items during the year, regular details of events, and more or less daily updates of wildlife reports.
- The Biodiversity Officer gave presentations on aspects of biodiversity in Tower Hamlets to the Food Growing Network, students at the Brady Centre on a design course themed around Urban Habitats, and the Tower Hamlets in Bloom awards ceremony (see photo above).
- Over 200 species records were sent to Greenspace Information for Greater London, the environmental records centre.
- A “have you seen a hedgehog?” publicity campaign, including an article in *East End Life*, produced one confirmed 2013 sighting at Mudchute and two 2012 records from nearby gardens, confirming that hedgehogs still survive in Tower Hamlets, at least in the south of the Isle of Dogs.
- A review of the LBAP commenced. This will lead to the adoption in autumn 2014 of a new LBAP for 2014-19.

Priorities for 2014/15

- Continue to update and develop the Tower Habitats website
- Launch a public participation survey to monitor bees
- Complete review of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Case study: Mile End Park becomes a Site of Metropolitan Importance



The Ecology Park and Pavilion, Mile End Park (Mohammed Raja)

Over the last 15 or so years, Mile End Park has developed into a fantastic example of how to integrate wildlife habitat into a busy, well-used urban park. In addition to the diverse habitats of the Ecology Park, there are copses and colourful meadows throughout the park. These habitats support a diverse invertebrate community, including two spiders new to Britain, as well as birds and large populations of amphibians. Perhaps more importantly, Mile End Park provides daily contact with nature for the thousands of people who visit or walk through it. Long recognised as a Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation, the MEP Ecology Forum believed that it was better than that, and warranted recognition as a Site of Metropolitan Importance, the highest grade of local wildlife site in London. The Biodiversity Officer prepared a report and sent it to the London Wildlife Sites Board, recommending the Board upgrade Mile End Park to Metropolitan Importance. Following a site visit with Board members in June 2013, the Board agreed, and Mile End Park became a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation in September 2013.

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, Women's Environment Network 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)
Andy Clark (Tower Hamlets Homes)
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)
Nick Martin (Poplar HARCA)
Clare Matheson (Tower Hamlets Homes)
Katherine O'Brien (LBTH Parks)
Mohammed Raja (LBTH Parks)
Theo Thomas (Thames21)
Paul Wilson (EastendHomes)