

**Ref:**

**Date:** 23 September 2013

John Archer  
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Dear John

**Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation  
Tower Hamlets Council's proposal to identify Mile End Park as a Site of Metropolitan  
Importance for Nature Conservation**

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the London Wildlife Sites Board (LWSB). The LWSB was established to ensure that the selection and approval of Sites of Importance or Nature Conservation (SINCs) by London Boroughs is consistent with:

- national guidance set out in *Local Sites – guidance on their identification, selection and management* (Defra 2006)
- regional policy as set out in Appendix 1 of the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy *Connecting to London's Nature* (GLA, 2002)
- regional guidance in the London Plan Implementation Report *London's Foundations* (GLA, 2009)

The views of the LWSB should be sought when the Borough is seeking to select a new Site of Metropolitan Importance (SMI) for nature conservation or to change the boundary or status of an existing SMI. By so doing the Borough can demonstrate that its proposals are consistent with the existing policy framework in London.

**The Appendix to this letter provides the views of the LWSB regarding Tower Hamlets Council's proposal to identify Mile End Park as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation.**

Yours sincerely



Peter Massini  
Chair, London Wildlife Sites Board

## APPENDIX

### London Wildlife Sites Board Advisory Comments on Mile End Park

Set out below is a summary of your proposal to identify Mile End Park as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for nature conservation, and the LWSB comments on your Borough's evidence for the proposed change.

<b>Borough:</b>	Tower Hamlets
<b>Document:</b>	Report (attached) prepared in January 2013 by John Archer, Biodiversity Officer, LB Tower Hamlets setting out reasons for proposed change
<b>Submitted by:</b>	John Archer, Biodiversity Officer, LB Tower Hamlets
<b>Date of LWSB meeting:</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> February 2013 with follow up site visit on 25 <sup>th</sup> June 2013
<b>LWSB Members:</b>	Peter Massini - Greater London Authority Alister Hayes - London Wildlife Trust John Archer - London Borough of Tower Hamlets Ian Holt - London Borough of Haringey Maria Longley - Greenspace Information for Greater London David Brook - London Geodiversity Partnership Nick Pond - London Borough of Lewisham Tasha Hunter - London Borough of Richmond

#### Summary of Tower Hamlets evidence for proposed change of status to Site of Metropolitan Importance

A review of the Sites of Importance for nature conservation in Tower Hamlets was submitted to the LWSB meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> October 2011. The LWSB endorsed the proposed changes identified in this review. The review also indicated that the Borough would consider a change in status of Mile End Park.

John Archer, Biodiversity Officer at Tower Hamlets submitted a report on Mile End Park to the LWSB meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> February 2013. The report set out the following information regarding the site :

- Mile End Park is currently identified as a Site of Borough Importance for nature conservation;
- the site comprises 23.5 hectares of formal parkland and extensive areas of meadows, wetlands and woodland which were created when the park was extensively remodelled and landscaped during the late 1990's;
- it is a well-used, popular resource and comprises a significant area of green space in an otherwise heavily urbanised part of inner East London;
- the site merits identification as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for the following reasons:
  - the park contains some of the best-established examples of habitat creation in London
  - a number of nationally rare and uncommon invertebrates have been found in the park
  - the park contains a high diversity of habitats
  - the ponds are some of the best examples in inner east London and support locally important populations of frogs and toads

- the site is very well used and the parks main themes of play, arts, ecology and sport are incorporated into the design and management ethos of the park.

#### LWSB Comments on proposed change of status to Site of Metropolitan Importance

The members of the LWSB considered the report at the meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> February. The group agreed that the design and management of the park was sufficiently different from other large inner London parks to merit consideration as a Site of Metropolitan Importance, but that a site visit was necessary to confirm that the design and management ethos was delivering significant nature conservation outcomes.

A sit visit for LWSB members was arranged for 25<sup>th</sup> June 2013. The members wished to test in particular whether the following criterion for selecting Sites of Metropolitan Importance for nature conservation was applicable to Mile End Park:

*“A small number of sites are selected which are of particular significance within heavily built up areas of London. Although these are of lesser intrinsic quality than those sites selected as the best examples of habitats on a London-wide basis they are outstanding oases and provide the opportunity for enjoyment of nature in extensive built environments. Examples include St James’s Park, Nunhead Cemetery, Camley Street Natural Park and Sydenham Hill Woods. In some cases (e.g. inner London parks) this is the primary reason for their selection. For sites of higher intrinsic interest it may only be a contributory factor. Only those sites that provide a significant contribution to the ecology of an area are identified.”* (From 'Policy, criteria and procedures for identifying nature conservation sites in London' Appendix 1, Mayors Biodiversity Strategy, 2002)

The LWSB confirmed that the site did indeed meet this key criterion due to:

- the size of the park and connectivity to other sites in what is a densely populated part of inner east London;
- the site being a good example and demonstration of how to design a large modern multi-functional park for biodiversity;
- the diversity of habitats and the ability for large numbers of people to experience them.
- the excellent access to nature, both through the recreational and educational opportunities the site provides in an informal, varied, undulating and attractive landscape

#### Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence provided by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the assessment by LWSB members on a site visit to Mile End Park, the LWSB supports the Borough’s proposal to identify Mile End Park as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for nature conservation.

## ATTACHMENTS

### Information submitted by John Archer, Biodiversity Officer, LB Tower Hamlets – January 2013

#### Mile End Park – proposed upgrade to Metropolitan Importance

##### 1 Introduction

1.1 Mile End Park in Tower Hamlets is a Site of Borough Grade I Importance for Nature Conservation. This paper sets out reasons why it should be upgraded to a Site of Metropolitan Importance, taking account of the criteria set out in the Mayor of London's guidance on selection of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.

##### 2 Overview

2.1 Mile End Park is a large, heavily-used urban park in the East End. It was almost completely re-landscaped in the late 1990s to incorporate informal landscaping, with extensive areas of wildlife habitats including meadows, woodland and wetlands. These are now well-established, and the park supports a good diversity of wildlife. While park users were initially sceptical about this new approach to the landscape, it is now very popular and a much-loved local resource.

2.2 While perhaps not quite of Metropolitan Importance for its intrinsic biodiversity, Mile End Park is an exemplar of how to integrate wildlife habitat into a sizeable and very busy urban park. In the same way that Camley Street Natural Park was designated as a Site of Metropolitan Importance in the 1980s as an example of best practice in creating a small inner urban nature park, so Mile End Park is of Metropolitan Importance to demonstrate how to design a modern multi-functional park for biodiversity.

##### 3 Review against London criteria

###### 3.1 Representation

While it contains no specific habitats of London-wide importance, Mile End Park contains some of the most extensive and best-established examples of deliberately-created meadows in London. The ponds in the Ecology Park are among the best in a large area of inner East London.

###### 3.2 Habitat rarity

None of the habitats are particularly rare on a London-wide scale, but reed beds and sizeable areas of flower-rich grassland are not common in inner East London.

###### 3.3 Species rarity

A number of Red Data Book and Nationally Notable invertebrates have been found in Mile End Park, particularly spiders and beetles, the two groups which have been best studied. These include two spiders new to Britain (a remarkable record for a London park), one of which has since been found in a few other sites outside London, while the other is still known only from Mile End Park. Both species have Continental ranges extending to coasts near Britain, and are believed to have colonised naturally. Rare beetles include the very rare Streaked Bombardier Beetle (*Brachinus sclopeta*) known in Britain only from a handful of urban sites in London, and the rove beetle *Amarachara forticornis*, thought to be a species mainly of shingle beaches, previously recorded in London only from one or two green roofs.

###### 3.4 Habitat richness

Mile End Park contains a high diversity of habitats. The extensive meadows are quite variable in character, due to differing nutrient status and pH across the site. There are also substantial areas of young woodland and scrub and tall herbaceous vegetation. Wetlands include several ponds, and small areas of reed bed in the Ecology Park. There are also small areas of nectar-rich formal herbaceous beds. The park is currently short of mature trees, especially of native species, as most of the older trees planted are typical pollution-resistant forms such as hybrid plane and lime.

### **3.5 Species richness**

As most of the plants in the park were originally planted, diversity is probably best assessed in terms of animals. The site supports particularly rich assemblages of spiders (159 spp. including 4 Nationally Notables) and beetles (320 spp. including 18 Nationally Notables). Further species are being added to these lists each year. While this is partly a result of search effort, with regular pitfall trapping having been undertaken over a number of years, the species richness of these groups compares favourably with other well-surveyed sites in London, and it is particularly interesting to note that leaf beetles (Chrysomelidae) and weevils (Curculionidae and Apionidae) are particularly well-represented. These are herbivorous beetles and reflect the botanical diversity of the park. The ponds support three species of amphibians. Breeding birds include species not normally found in inner East London, including whitethroat and blackcap.

### **3.6 Size**

At 23.5 hectares, Mile End Park is quite large for an inner London site.

### **3.7 Important populations of species**

The ponds in the Ecology Park support large population of common toads (over 100 individuals) and common frog (over 50 clumps of spawn).

### **3.8 Ancient character**

Mile End Park has only been open space since the 1940s and has been almost completely re-landscaped over the last 20 years. There are a few small areas which appear to be older grassland.

### **3.9 Re-creatability**

All of the habitats in Mile End Park could be readily re-created within 10-15 years, given a suitably large site. A large part of the value of the site is as an example of how to successfully create and integrate wildlife habitats into an urban park.

### **3.10 Typical urban character**

Mile End Park is very much an urban site, and incorporates a number of features of industrial archaeology as well as an innovative Green Bridge.

### **3.11 Cultural or historic character**

Mile End Park has its own unique character, driven by community consultation during its design. The park's main themes – play, art, ecology, sport and fun – have planned areas of concentration, but are also threaded throughout the whole park.

### **3.12 Geographic position**

3.12.1 Mile End Park is in a densely populated part of inner east London with high levels of deprivation.

3.12.2 Connectivity is not specifically included in the criteria for selection of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in London, although it is seen as very important in national thinking about landscape-scale conservation and ecosystem services.

This section seems to be the most appropriate to address this issue. Mile End Park forms a very important link in a network of habitats in inner East London, connecting Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park to Victoria Park and, via the canals, to the Lee Valley and the Thames.

### **3.13 Access**

There is free public access to Mile End Park at all times, and it is used by large numbers of people. Careful mowing regimes in the grassy areas have helped to encourage visitors to reduce trampling and damage to grassland, encouraging plant diversity and invertebrates such as meadow ants.

### **3.14 Use**

Many of the large numbers of visitors to the park enjoy its natural character. The ecology park is also much used for education. Ongoing surveys of beetles and spiders monitor changes in species composition over time.

### **3.15 Potential**

There is potential to create even more and better habitats, and this potential is being explored all the time. New meadows and hedgerows are still being created. The woodlands offer scope to experiment on how to improve the biodiversity value of planted woodlands in urban parks.

### **3.16 Aesthetic appeal**

Mile End Park's informal, varied landscape is widely regarded as being very attractive, especially the flower meadows.

## **4 Consultation**

4.1 The Steering Group of the Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Partnership, and members of the Mile End Park Ecology Forum, have been consulted on the proposal to upgrade Mile End Park to Metropolitan importance, and all strongly support the proposal.

John Archer, Biodiversity Officer, LB Tower Hamlets, January 2013

## Feedback submitted following LWSB site visit on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2013

From: Pond, Nicholas

Sent: 27 June 2013 10:36

To: Pond, Nicholas; 'Peter Massini'; 'Alister Hayes'; 'davebrookgeo@hotmail.com'; 'Ian Holt'; 'John Archer'; 'Maria Longley'; 'Mathew Frith'; 'Tasha Hunter'

Subject: Mile end park visit 25th June 2013

Dear Pete (et al),

Following from a site visit to Mile End Park on the 25th June by John Archer, Dave Brook, Ian Holt, Maria Longley and myself, we unanimously support the proposed designation of Mile End Park as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and concur with the supporting statements prepared by John Archer [attached].

The criteria from the, 'Policy, criteria and procedures for identifying nature conservation sites in London' which we feel is a fit for Mile End Park is as follows:

A1.2.3.4 A small number of sites are selected which are of particular significance within heavily built up areas of London. Although these are of lesser intrinsic quality than those sites selected as the best examples of habitats on a Londonwide basis they are outstanding oases and provide the opportunity for enjoyment of nature in extensive built environments. Examples include St James's Park, Nunhead Cemetery, Camley Street Natural Park and Sydenham Hill Woods. In some cases (eg inner London parks) this is the primary reason for their selection. For sites of higher intrinsic interest it may only be a contributory factor. Only those sites that provide a significant contribution to the ecology of an area are identified.

The features that we feel are particularly significant for Mile End Park are: the size of the park and connectivity to other sites (such as, Regents Canal Metropolitan SINC Site) in what is a densely populated part of inner east London.

Mile End Park is a good example and demonstration of how to design a large modern multi-functional park for biodiversity and although none of the habitats are particularly rare they are diverse. There are some rare plants but perhaps more significant are a number of rare and nationally notable invertebrates associated with the space, in addition to important populations of amphibians.

The park provides excellent access to nature, both through recreation and education. It has an informal, varied undulating landscape and is widely regarded as being very attractive especially the flowering meadows.

We would therefore like to endorse the proposal and request that the GLA seek to put into place the formal measures to designate Mile End Park as a Metropolitan SINC site. I've also attached a GiGL map of the current Borough Grade 1 designated area.

I hope that this is all in order.

Best wishes

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