

Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Annual Report 2015



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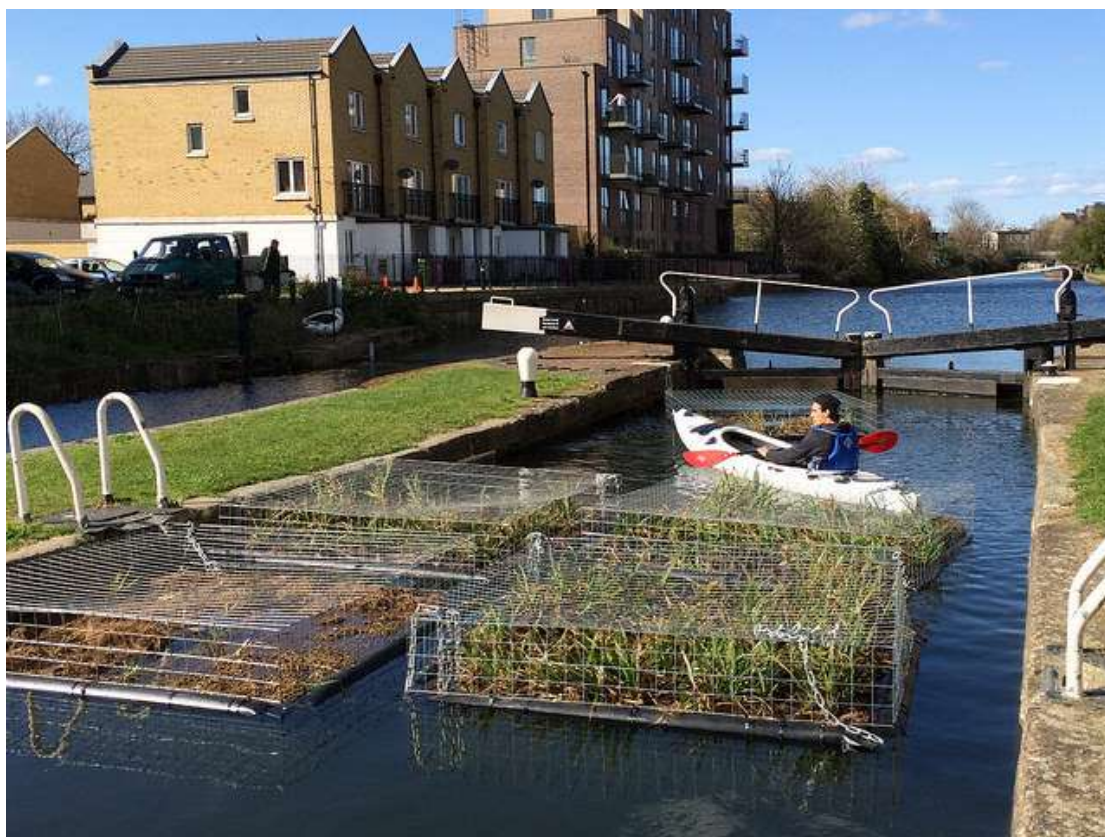
Front cover photo: Black Poplar in Meath Gardens (John Archer)

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 first year of the LBAP, from October 2014 to September 2015 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.

Although it is very early days in the implementation of the LBAP, good progress has been made in identifying projects which will deliver most of the targets. As the report demonstrates, some very exciting schemes, which will greatly enhance the borough for people as well as wildlife, have already been delivered.



Rafts of reeds are transported across the Regent's Canal – see page 9 (Molly Gadenz)

Built environment



Green roof cycle shelter, Westferry Estate (Paul Wilson)

Achievements in 2014/15

- EastendHomes installed a cycle shelter with a biodiverse roof on the Westferry Estate (see photo above and page 5 for more details).
- The Council's Clean & Green volunteers planted bulbs in disused planters in Cotton Street to provide spring colour for people to enjoy, and nectar for bees and other pollinators.
- The Council's Green Team has planted nectar-rich flowers, which will provide food for bees and other pollinators, in tubs along Roman Road and adjacent streets.
- Planning permission has been granted for developments which, if and when built, will provide over two hectares of biodiverse green roofs.

Projects planned for 2015/16

- The Council and London Legacy Development Corporation are to install a new landscape scheme on Silvocea Way, close to Bow Creek, with a variety of new wildlife habitats.
- The Council's Highways section will create four new rain gardens, with meadow and/or nectar-rich flowers, as sustainable urban drainage systems on streets that are liable to flooding.

Case study: Green Roof Cycle Shelter, Westferry Estate



Green roof on cycle store, Westferry Estate (Paul Wilson)

At the end of 2014, EastendHomes installed a cycle shelter with a biodiverse green roof on the Westferry Estate. A survey in autumn 2015 found that the roof had established extremely well, with a thriving and diverse plant community. Around 30 species of mostly native flowers and grasses were recorded, including Bladder Campion, Oxeye Daisy, Viper's Bugloss, Chives, Wild Carrot, Common Centaury, Musk Mallow, Wild Thyme, Wild Marjoram, Selfheal, Corn Poppy, White Campion, Common Mouse-ear, two species of Coreopsis, Biting, Reflexed and White Stonecrops and Common Toadflax.

This highlights the opportunity to put green roofs on the numerous small buildings which are found across most housing estates. With the loss of brownfield land, green roofs are increasingly important for open mosaic habitats and the invertebrates they support. While this cycle shelter contributes just five square metres to the LBAP target for new open mosaic habitats, it could be replicated hundreds of times across the borough's estates.

The cycle shelter is also fitted with a sparrow terrace nest box and nest boxes suitable for solitary bees, contributing to additional LBAP targets.

Gardens and grounds



Volunteers planting trees at Cable Gardens (Trees for Cities)

Achievements in 2014/15

- Residents have provided lots of new wildlife habitats at Approach Gardens. See more details on page 7 and [here](#).
- The Morgan Stanley Healthy Cities Garden, which won a Gold medal at the Chelsea Flower Show, has been replanted at Limborough Green on Poplar HARCA's Burdett Estate. The garden, created by renowned garden designer Chris Beardshaw, is full of nectar-rich flowers.
- Tower Hamlets Homes planted 26 annual wildflower meadows across their estates in the winter of 2014-15.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park created five new bee-friendly gardens, designed to provide nectar for as much of the year as possible, for EastendHomes at Derwent, Ennerdale, Beckley, Buttermere and Tracy Houses in Mile End. The garden at Derwent House also includes a mixed native hedge and a small orchard.
- Poplar HARCA planted 5000 bulbs and 1000 wildflower plugs in the Diamond Garden, as well as creating a big log mound. Another 5000 bulbs will be added in the autumn. Another 1000 wildflower plugs were planted at Dewberry Street, where seed will be added in the autumn.
- Trees for Cities and local residents created a new wildlife-friendly garden for EastendHomes on the St George's Estate in March 2015. Cable Gardens, as it is called, includes a grove of hazel, native trees and lots of nectar-rich flowers. See more [here](#). Corporate volunteers planted 2000 Bluebells and Snowdrops in autumn 2015.
- Tower Hamlets Homes created 56 metres of mixed native hedge in March 2015 at Matilda House by coppicing existing native shrubs and planting 350 whips. Read more [here](#).
- Nest boxes, including a sparrow terrace, were installed at Cable Street Community Garden in early 2015. Find out more [here](#).

Projects planned for 2015/16

- Tower Hamlets Homes will continue the Matilda House hedge along the St Katharine's Way frontage of the estate in autumn 2015.
- Peabody Housing Association will create a new, wildlife-friendly garden on its Wapping estate early in 2016.
- Tower Hamlets Homes will create a further 21 annual wildflower meadows and plant bulbs in three more sites in autumn 2015.
- Poplar HARCA will plant 20,000 bulbs of a butterfly-friendly mix at Rounton Road and create a wildflower area at Sleaford House Green in autumn 2015, and create a new wildflower meadow at Rainhill Way in spring 2016.

Case study: Approach Gardens



The meadow at Approach Gardens (Colin Toogood)

With a biodiversity grant from Tower Hamlets Homes, the residents who grow food at Approach Gardens introduced a wide variety of wildlife habitats in 2014. These included a wildflower meadow, climbing plants on the fence, bird and bee boxes, an insect hotel and a bird feeding station. The 65 square metre meadow was sown in early October 2014, becoming probably the first project completed under the new LBAP. In 2015, the meadow provided a spectacular display of wild flowers (see photo above). These are mostly annuals, which will gradually disappear to be replaced by perennial wild flowers as the meadow matures. More details and photos can be seen [here](#).

Not content with their efforts in 2014, the gardeners continued to improve the site for wildlife in 2015, adding a pond and 20 metres of mixed native hedge.

Rivers and standing water



Vegetated rafts in the Wapping Canal (John Archer)

Achievements in 2014/15

- The Lower Regents Coalition installed reed beds and other native wetland vegetation along 110 metres of the Regent's Canal through its "Greening the Regents" project. See page 9 and [here](#) for more details.
- The Council's Green Team led a project to clean and green the Wapping Canal by Tobacco Dock. The first phase in June 2015 saw around a hundred volunteers from Citibank remove litter, paint railings and install new duck platforms. The following month, Bow Landscapes and local volunteers helped to install six rafts covered in native wetland vegetation (see photo above). Read more [here](#) and [here](#).
- Hollybrook Homes have created a wildlife pond beside the Regent's Canal as part of the landscaping of the new housing development at Sutton's Wharf. The pond occupies about 350 square metres, and has been planted with a wide range of native aquatic plants. A two-metre-wide strip of damp meadow, sown with a pond-edge wildflower mix, surrounds the pond.
- Residents created a new pond in Approach Gardens (see page 7).

Projects planned for 2015/16

- The Council's Green team hopes, subject to consultation with residents, to install floating reed beds at the eastern end of the Wapping Canal.
- Thames21 will install a 45-metre-long "floating ecosystem" in the Lea Navigation at Bow Locks in December 2015. This is a raft with native wetland vegetation on top and habitat for fish and microbes which improve water quality below.
- The Council will install a Kingfisher nesting bank beside the Regent's Canal at the Brunton Wharf estate.
- Nomad Projects and Teesdale & Hollybush TRA will create six new ponds at Bethnal Green Nature Reserve in autumn 2015.

Case study: Greening the Regents



Installing planters in the Regent's Canal (Lower Regents Coalition)

With support from the Canal & River Trust and Thames21, and a grant from the Tower Hill Trust, the Lower Regents Coalition (a group of local volunteers) successfully completed the "Greening the Regents" project. The group first undertook extensive litter-picks and clean-ups, removing huge amounts of rubbish from the canal. This was followed in April 2015 by installing rafts planted with reeds and other native wetland vegetation along over 100 metres of the canal in Mile End, opposite the Ragged school Museum.

This will greatly improve the habitat for water birds, aquatic insects and fish in this section of canal, as well as providing a greener, pleasanter view for people walking along the tow-path. It contributes to LBAP targets, improving 110 metres of canal and creating 26 square metres of new reed bed. Read more [here](#).

Parks and open spaces



Planting a Black Poplar in All Saints Churchyard (Bob Gilbert)

Achievements in 2014/15

- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park have enhanced over 4000 square metres of woodland and almost 2000 square metres of grassland in Cemetery Park by a variety of methods including control of bramble and other invasive species, reducing soil fertility with crushed concrete, and planting bulbs and plugs.
- The Mudchute Association, with the help of corporate volunteers, completed the dead hedge around the wetlands and created loggeries nearby and on the Nature Trail to provide dead wood habitats for invertebrates. Work also started on enhancements to the woodland near the Asda entrance and chalk grassland restoration nearby.
- The Council's Parks section planted bulbs in 100m² of woodland and 300m² of grassland at Weavers Fields, Mile End Park and Altab Ali Park and created nectar-rich herbaceous beds at Altab Ali Park and St George's Gardens to provide nectar for bees and other pollinators. Read more about the Weavers Woodland Walk enhancements [here](#).
- The Council's Sustainable Development Team co-ordinated planting of 17 Black Poplar cuttings in parks across the borough. The cuttings were taken from from genetically unique trees. Sadly, only three of these (two in Meath Gardens and one in Cemetery Park) have survived the dry summer. Find out more [here](#).
- A Black Poplar was planted in All Saints Churchyard, Poplar, as part of the Beating of the Bounds ceremony (photo above). Read more [here](#).
- The Council's Green Team planted native whips to create half a hectare of new woodland at Jolly's Green. See page 11 and [here](#) for more details.
- The Council's Green Team installed bird boxes and four bat boxes in Island Gardens.

Projects planned for 2015/16

- The Council's Green Team is to plant six Black Poplars in Meath Gardens in autumn 2015.
- The Mudchute Association will plant a new mixed native hedge and continue to enhance the plantation woodland by the Asda entrance.
- The London Beekeepers' Association will plant wild flowers in the Upper and Lower Fields and nectar-rich perennials by the café to provide more forage for bees at Mudchute.
- The Council's Parks section plans to plant an orchard of 16 fruit trees in the children's growing area of Mile End Park in late autumn 2015.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will continue to enhance woodland and grassland habitats in Cemetery Park.

Case study: new woodland at Jolly's Green



The recently-planted woodland at Jolly's Green (Lesley Pearce)

The Council's Green Team planted 1200 small trees at Jolly's Green Open Space in early 2015, to create a new woodland. The planting consisted of a mixture of native whips, including Field Maple, Hazel, Cherry, Buckthorn, Elder and Guelder Rose. The trees were planted to address the fact that there is little woodland in Tower Hamlets. The creation of this new woodland will encourage wildlife, reduce local air and noise pollution and enhance the local environment.

The new wood, which covers about half a hectare, exceeds the target for new native woodland in the LBAP. The inclusion of Buckthorn, the caterpillar foodplant of the Brimstone butterfly, contributes to another LBAP target.

Despite the very dry spring and summer, over 90% of the whips survived their first growing season. Read more [here](#).

Action plan promotion and monitoring



The Lower Regent's Coalition collect their award (Canal & River Trust)

Achievements in 2014/15

- Nearly 500 species records were sent to Greenspace Information for Greater London, the environmental records centre.
- The Biodiversity Officer commented on over 150 planning applications during the year, ensuring that almost all of these will provide biodiversity enhancements.
- The Council installed new interpretation signs around the lakes in Victoria Park with information about water birds, fish and other wildlife.
- Around 20 volunteers have been counting bees for the Tower Hamlets Bee Survey. See more details on page 13, [here](#) and [here](#).
- During the year, the Biodiversity Officer gave presentations on the LBAP to the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum Development Sub-Group and the Friends Groups Forum, ran a training course on biodiversity for the Council's Development Management Team and gave a lecture on biodiversity in Tower Hamlets to Queen Mary University of London's first year geography students.
- Tower Hamlets' parks triumphed in the London in Bloom and Green Flag Awards. Ten Green Flags and 2 Green Flag Community Awards were topped by Victoria Park again being voted the nation's favourite park in the Green Flag People's Choice Award. Read more [here](#).
- Partners also enjoyed success with awards. The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park were joint winners of the Ethical Wildlife Award in the prestigious Observer Ethical Awards (find out more [here](#)). The Lower Regents Coalition came second in the volunteer and community category of the 2015 Living Waterways Awards (see photo above and read more [here](#)).

Projects planned for 2015/16

- The Tower Hill Trust will provide grants for schools and community groups for projects which contribute to LBAP objectives and targets.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will install a “Plants and People Trail” in the park in spring 2016.
- The Mudchute Association will improve paths and steps and provide interpretation to create a new nature trail around the park and farm.

Case study: The Tower Hamlets Bee Survey



Brown-banded Carder Bee at Spitalfields Farm (John Archer)

The Tower Hamlets Bee Survey was launched in spring 2014 to monitor numbers of bees, particularly bumblebees, in the borough's open spaces. Volunteers are asked to count bees in their chosen site for 15 minutes, at least once a month during the months when bees are active. The counts are entered online through the website of Greenspace Information for Greater London, the environmental records centre. All volunteers receive a free bee identification chart, and training sessions are available.

During the two years the survey has been running, 20 individuals or groups of volunteers have made over 150 counts at 25 sites. A total of 2346 bees of 16 species have been recorded, including 915 bumblebees of nine species. This included 14 individuals of the nationally scarce Brown-banded Carder Bee, a priority species in the LBAP, at five sites. The highest single count, of 164 bees, was from Lion Mills Community Garden, while the highest bumblebee count was 59 from the Millennium Park in Mile End Park.

The results will help to monitor bee populations in the borough, and can help to guide management of sites. For example, if a park has very few bees in spring, that park could be targeted for planting spring bulbs to provide more nectar.

If you would like to take part in the Bee Survey, please contact the Biodiversity Officer (e-mail john.archer@towerhamlets.gov.uk or phone 020 7364 7478) with your name and details of the site where you would like to count bees. This can be anywhere with sufficient flowers to attract bees – your garden, a local park or community garden, planters on your estate, even a window box. Find out more [here](#) and [here](#).

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 target” for completed projects

Table 1: Progress towards LBAP targets, October 2015

Objective	Target	Units	Total completed	Total identified but not completed	Still to identify	% completed	% identified
Grassland enhanced	1	hectares	0.15	0.30	0.55	15	45.1
New meadow	1	hectares	0.02	0.33	0.65	2.2	34.9
New chalk meadow	No target	hectares	0	0.14	N/A	N/A	N/A
Restore chalk grassland	0.25	hectares	0	0.08	0.18	0	30
New Open Mosaic Habitat	1	hectares	0.0005	2.92	Target exceeded	0.1	292.2
Woodland enhanced	5	hectares	0.11	2.51	2.38	2.2	52.3
New native woodland	0.2	hectares	0.52	0.13	Target exceeded	258.1	321.5
New orchard	0.5	hectares	0.002	0.07	0.43	0.4	14.4
New hedge	0.5	kilometres	0.06	0.66	Target exceeded	12	144.4
River enhanced	0.2	kilometres	0.00	0.64	Target exceeded	0	320
Canal enhanced	0.25	kilometres	0.18	0.43	Target exceeded	72.8	242.8
Dock enhanced	5	sites	0	4	1	0	80
New pond	5	ponds	2	13	Target exceeded	40	300
Reed bed enhanced	0.1	hectares	0	0.01	0.09	0	9
New reed bed	0.25	hectares	0.003	0.06	0.18	1	26.8
Bat box	20	sites	3	16	1	15	95

Objective	Target	Units	Total completed	Total identified but not completed	Still to identify	% completed	% identified
Night-scented plants	No target	sites	1	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hedgehog home	No target	sites	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Otter holts	2	sites	0	1	1	0	50
Black redstart box	5	sites	0	9	Target exceeded	0	180
Tern rafts	10	rafts	0	16	Target exceeded	0	160
Artificial House Martin nests	5	sites	0	2	3	0	40
Sparrow terrace	20	sites	2	7	11	10	45
New dense climbers	No target	sites	0	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kingfisher bank	3	banks	0	5	Target exceeded	0	166.7
Peregrine box	5	sites	0	1	4	0	20
Sand Martin bank	3	banks	0	2	1	0	66.7
Swift box	15	sites	0	10	5	0	66.7
Terrestrial habitat round pond	No target	sites	1	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
Eel pass	1	sites	0	0	1	0	0
Plant buckthorn	25	sites	3	8	14	12	44
Plant birdsfoot trefoil	10	sites	2	27	Target exceeded	20	290
Plant nectar-rich flowers	50	sites	41	73	Target exceeded	82	228
Bee box/insect hotel	20	sites	1	7	12	5	40
Loggery	15	sites	10	8	Target exceeded	66.7	120
Plant black poplar	25	trees	4	14	7	16	72

Discussion

It is early days in the implementation of the LBAP, but significant progress has been made towards most targets, at least in terms of identifying projects which will deliver them.

The target for new native woodland has already been greatly exceeded, in a single completed project (see page 11). For a further 11 objectives, projects have been identified which would achieve or exceed the target if they are all completed, with six more objectives with projects identified which would deliver over half the target. Only two objectives have less than 10% of the total target identified in projects, of which reed bed enhancement is the most significant. Working with relevant partners to encourage reed bed enhancement projects should be a high priority for the next couple of years.

It should be borne in mind that there is considerable uncertainty around the figures for projects that have been identified but not completed. A few large planning applications are identified as delivering significant contributions to several objectives. In particular, Wood Wharf, Leamouth North and Leamouth South between them are due to deliver a very high proportion of the identified new open mosaic habitats, river enhancements, new reed bed and tern rafts. While it is highly likely that these developments will be completed and deliver the expected biodiversity enhancements, it is far from clear, especially with Wood Wharf, whether these will all be delivered within the lifetime of the current LBAP. Similarly, most of the identified new native hedge, and significant proportions of the new meadow and chalk grassland, are expected to be delivered by the re-landscaping of Bartlett Park, but the detailed planting scheme is yet to be finalised.

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, Cable Street Community Gardens, Canal & River Trust, Canary Wharf Group plc, Circle Housing, 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 Beekeepers' Association, 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, 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 (December 2015):

John Archer (LBTH Biodiversity Officer, Chair)
John Swindells (local resident, Vice-Chair)
Derek Barclay (Circle Housing)
Allan Cousens (local resident)
Lydia Davis (Trees for Cities)
Sam Dundas-Dunbar (LBTH Clean & Green Volunteer Co-ordinator)
Ben Fenton (Thames21)
Nick Golson (Mudchute Association)
Ken Greenway (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)
Michael Hime (LBTH Green Team)
Matus Holecko (Tower Hamlets Homes)
Abdul Khan (LBTH Sustainable Development Manager)
Terry Lyle (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)
Nick Martin (Poplar HARCA)
Katherine O'Brien (LBTH Parks)
Harriet Peacock (LBTH Development Management)
Mohammed Raja (LBTH Parks)
Stephen Rodgers (Metropolitan Police Borough Wildlife Crime Officer)
Sri Sudhaker (LBTH Strategic Planning)
Matthew Twohig (LBTH Green Team)
Selina Uddin (East London Business Alliance)
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: Halim Abdul, Manmohan Dayal, Clare Matheson, Theo Thomas.

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)