

# Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan

## Annual Report 2016



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Front cover photo: Annual “meadow” at Commercial Road (Veronica Suwara)

## 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 second year of the LBAP, from October 2015 to September 2016 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 still quite early 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.



Tern rafts in Millwall Inner Dock (see page 8) (John Archer)



## Built environment



Meadow roof over the Mile End Crossrail vent shaft (John Archer)

### Achievements in 2015/16

- The Council's Highways team installed rain gardens in Bacon Street (see page 5), Dee Street and Manchester Road as sustainable urban drainage systems to reduce flooding. The Manchester Road scheme was planted with herbaceous perennials for a colourful display and to provide nectar for pollinating insects, while the other two were planted with wildflower turf to create mini-meadows.
- Construction work is well under way on Ballymore's London City Island development on the Leamouth Peninsula. In addition to enhancements to the River Lea and wildlife-friendly landscaping, the scheme will provide a total of 7843 square metres of biodiverse roofs of three different types (delivering almost 80% of the LBAP target for new open mosaic habitat), as well as nest boxes for Swifts, House Martins and Peregrines.
- The Council's Clean & Green volunteers installed planters full of nectar-rich flowers along nine streets in various parts of the borough, through the Adopt-a-Garden scheme and corporate volunteering days. These will brighten up the street scene as well as providing vital forage for bumblebees and other pollinators. See page 5 for details of one of these schemes at Bacon Street.
- The Crossrail vent shaft beside Mile End Park Leisure Centre is covered by meadow turf. Thus what appears to be another wildflower-rich mound on the edge of Mile End Park is in fact a green roof (see photo above).

## Projects planned for 2016/17

- The Council's Highways team intends to create new rain gardens as sustainable urban drainage systems at Spindrift Avenue and St Leonard's Street.

### Case study: Bacon Street rain gardens and planters



Children planting herbs at Bacon Street (LBTH)

Following residents' concerns over antisocial behaviour (ASB) in Bacon Street, and a desire for local people to 'take ownership', a new Adopt-a-Garden scheme evolved. The Bacon Street project saw the installation of 12 raised planters along the length of Bacon Street and outside St Matthias Primary School. Local volunteers, including children from the school, planted a mixture of herbs and other nectar-rich perennials, which will provide forage for bees and other pollinators. To complement this project to green and beautify the urban landscape, a rain garden with wildflower turf was installed as a sustainable urban drainage system.

Residents have set up a gardening group and the space is regularly tended, with litter removed where necessary. Feedback has been very encouraging with ASB less of an issue, and the improved landscape and volunteering opportunities have had a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of local people.

## Gardens and grounds



Insect hotel at O'Brien House (Veronica Suwara)

### Achievements in 2015/16

- Poplar HARCA planted 30,000 bulbs of bee- and butterfly-friendly mixes at Rounton Road and Diamond Gardens, and created a wildflower area at Sleaford House Green in autumn 2015, with another new wildflower meadow at Rainhill Way planted in spring 2016
- Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) created 21 new annual wildflower “meadows” on its estates. THH also planted spring bulbs in lawns on three estates, and extended the hedge at Matilda House for a further 69 metres along the boundary on Stockholm Road. Read more [here](#). THH installed an insect hotel on the Greenways Estate (see photo above and read more details [here](#)) and bat boxes at three locations.
- Chisenhale School has greened its nursery playground, thanks to a grant from the Tower Hill Trust. Read more on page 7 and [here](#).
- Trees for Cities worked with EastendHomes and local residents to create a new community garden between Hatton and Shearsmith Houses on the St George's Estate. Volunteers planted trees, shrubs and bulbs, many of them chosen to provide nectar for bees and other pollinating insects. Read more [here](#).
- Tower Hamlets Community Housing, with help from the Clean & Green volunteering team, created a new pocket park by Winterton House. This includes a bed of nectar-rich perennials, mixed native hedge, and annual wildflowers in planters.
- The Council's Clean & Green volunteering team have created new community gardens with nectar-rich planting at Brabazon Street, Shipton House, John Scurr Community Centre and Barley Mow Veterans Club.



## Projects planned for 2016/17

- Tower Hamlets Homes will create a further six annual wildflower meadows and plant bulbs in three more sites in autumn 2016.
- The Council's Clean & Green volunteering team intend to create a new community garden at Head Street.
- Gateway Housing Association will restore the community garden at Pier Street, including wildlife enhancements.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will complete bee-friendly gardens for Gateway Housing in Bow Road and for the City of London Corporation at Dron House in autumn 2016.
- Arnhem Wharf, Malmesbury, Morpeth, Phoenix, Redlands, St Paul's Way, St Saviours and Stepney Greencoat Schools will all undertake biodiversity enhancements in their grounds thanks to Tower Habitats biodiversity grants from the Tower Hill Trust.

### Case study: Chisenhale School Nursery Wildlife Playground



Chisenhale School wildlife wall (Cassie Liversidge)

Chisenhale School has transformed its nursery playground ground from a run-down, messy area into a bee and wildlife friendly garden. Staff and volunteers pruned back and replanted willow domes, planted many herbs and flowers to attract pollinating insects, and planted fruit trees around the playground garden, including cherry and apple trees, with flowers and herbs to attract insects. They also installed a hedgehog house within the garden hedge, and created a great bug exploring area with bug hotels and habitat walls. The pupils made the bug hotels in DIY club, as well as nest boxes, one of which was used by Blue Tits to raise a family this summer.

The work was supported by a Tower Habitats biodiversity grant from the Tower Hill Trust. This scheme, which will run again in 2017, offers grants of up to £2000 to schools and community groups for projects which contribute to LBAP objectives. Read more [here](#).

## Rivers and standing water



Installing a floating reed bed at Bow Locks (Thames21)

### Achievements in 2015/16

- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park installed a Kingfisher nesting bank beside the Regent's Canal at the Brunton Wharf estate with funding from the Council's Sustainable Development Team (see page 9 and [here](#) for more details).
- Nomad Projects and Teesdale & Hollybush TRA created six new ponds at Bethnal Green Nature Reserve in autumn 2015. Frogs and newts bred in some of the ponds in 2016. Read more [here](#).
- Thames21 installed a 45-metre-long "floating ecosystem" in the Limehouse Cut 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 (see photo above and read more [here](#)). This was followed by 190 metres of new habitat in the Lea Navigation: 130 metres of reed bed at Bow Flyover and another 60-metre floating ecosystem by Tesco superstore. Read more [here](#)
- Millwall Inner Dock received wildlife enhancements in early 2016 as mitigation for the Design Cube development. Gabion baskets of native wetland vegetation were installed around the floating Design Cube, with two nesting rafts for Common Terns nearby (see photo on page 3 and read more [here](#)).



## Projects planned for 2016/17

- 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 extend the new reed beds in the Lea Navigation for a further 190 metres north of the Bow Roundabout, and hopes to install another floating ecosystem in the Limehouse Cut.

### Case study: Kingfisher bank at Brunton Wharf



Kingfisher bank at Brunton Wharf (Ken Greenway)

Kingfishers are regularly seen along the Regent's Canal and other waterways in the borough in winter, but always leave before the breeding season starts. This is probably due to a lack of suitable soft, vertical banks in which they can dig their nest burrows. Providing suitable nesting sites for Kingfishers is an objective in the LBAP, so the Council's Sustainable Development Team agreed to fund the construction of a kingfisher bank. The edge of the Brunton Wharf estate, where the canal is wide and relatively undisturbed, seemed an ideal location. The idea was supported by Tower Hamlets Homes and local residents.

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, working with Grounded Ecotherapy, were commissioned to build the bank. The bank is constructed of concrete, filled with tightly-packed soft sand, an ideal medium for Kingfishers to burrow into. An overhanging roof protects the exposed face of soft sand from predators such as foxes and rats. It is very similar to a highly successful design used at the RSPB's Rye Meads Nature Reserve, where Kingfishers have nested for years. See more details and lots more photos [here](#).

## Parks and open spaces



Meadow management at Cemetery Park (Ken Greenway)

### Achievements in 2015/16

- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park have enhanced 1.2 hectares of woodland and over 1000 square metres of grassland in Cemetery Park, and created three new mounds of chalk grassland in Cemetery Park and Ackroyd Drive Green Link (see photo above and page 11 for more information).
- The Council's Parks section planted an orchard of 16 fruit trees in the children's growing area of Mile End Park in late autumn 2015. They also installed loggeries in the two Woodland Walks in Mile End Park.
- The Mudchute Association worked with the Open Orchard Project to plant an orchard of 30 fruit trees in and around the pig pens – those planted in the pens were fitted with suitable protection from the pigs. Work commenced on enhancing the wood by the Asda entrance of Mudchute, and large areas of bramble were cleared to begin grassland restoration.
- The Council's Clean & Green volunteers installed a loggery, two bat boxes and five bird boxes in the woodland strip at Shadwell Basin during a clean-up event with Shadwell Basin Fishing Club.
- The Council's Green Team planted 300 native whips, including Field Maple, Hazel, Buckthorn, Blackthorn, Guelder Rose and Elder, plus a few Walnut saplings donated by Cable Street Community Garden, to create 1000 square metres of new woodland in Allen Gardens. The Green Team also planted six Black Poplars in Meath Gardens, and relaxed mowing of the western extension to Meath Gardens, which was managed as a meadow until a few years ago.
- Run-down flower beds in four parks were planted with nectar-rich herbaceous perennials by the Parks section and Green Team.

## Projects planned for 2016/17

- The Council's Green Team will plant ten Black Poplars in parks in autumn 2016.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will continue to enhance woodland and grassland habitats in Cemetery Park, and lay 115 metres of hedge near the main entrance.
- The Council's Green Team will create a new meadow in St George's Gardens in autumn 2016, and plans further meadows in Poplar Recreation Ground and Meath Gardens in 2017.
- The Mudchute Association will plant the first section of a new mixed native hedge alongside the path leading north from the pig pens, and continue to enhance the woodland by the Asda entrance and restore grasslands throughout the site.

### Case study: Enhancing habitats in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park



Creating a wildflower area with crushed concrete (Ken Greenway)

Cemetery Park is one of two Local Nature Reserves in the borough, and is managed for the Council by the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. Once almost entirely sycamore woodland, years of management has diversified the range of habitats in Cemetery Park, enhancing its wildlife and making it a more interesting place for visitors. This habitat creation and enhancement still continues, following a carefully thought-out management plan.

Woodland is enhanced by selectively removing sycamore, bramble, ivy and cow parsley, and planting native shrubs, bulbs and woodland wildflowers. Where soils are too fertile, sand or crushed concrete is added to the soil. Similar techniques are used to create and enhance meadows and grasslands, in areas where all trees and shrubs have been removed. The range of habitats, and in particular the large number of nectar-rich flowers to be found at almost any time of year, has made this probably the best site in inner London for butterflies, with 32 species recorded in recent years.

This management needs a lot of resources, and the Friends make good use of corporate volunteers. There are also regular volunteer workdays every Tuesday and on the first Sunday of every month. To find out more about volunteering opportunities at Cemetery Park, see the [Friends' website](#).



## Action plan promotion and monitoring



Hedgehog mural by Roo (Ken Greenway)

### Achievements in 2015/16

- The Biodiversity Officer commented on nearly 200 planning applications during the year, ensuring that almost all of these will provide biodiversity enhancements.
- The Council's Parks service installed new signage in Mile End Park, with signs around the woodland walks, and replacements for some of the old interpretation signs throughout the park.
- Murals depicting endangered wildlife were painted by local artists on the railway arches along Ackroyd Drive Green Link in early 2016, followed by murals of threatened British animals on the Soanes Centre in June 2016 (see photo above and see more [here](#)).
- Tower Hamlets' parks enjoyed great success in the Britain in Bloom, London in Bloom and Green Flag Awards. This was topped by Cemetery Park winning the national Wildlife & Conservation Award in Britain in Bloom, and Victoria Park yet again being voted one of the nation's favourite parks in the Green Flag People's Choice Award. Cemetery Park also won the Time Out Love London Award in the Bow & Mile End area Local Culture category for the third year running. See more [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- Paths and steps around Mudchute were improved and restored, thanks to a grant from the Tower Hill Trust, as the first stage to creating a new nature trail. Interpretation will follow next year.
- The Biodiversity Officer reviewed Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in the Borough (see page 13 and [here](#) for more details).

## Projects planned for 2016/17

- The Tower Hill Trust will continue to provide grants for schools and community groups for projects which contribute to LBAP objectives and targets.
- The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will open the multimedia “Plants and People Trail” in the park in spring 2017.
- The Mudchute Association will provide interpretation signs along the new nature trail around the park and farm.
- The Tower Habitats website will be updated onto new, easier-to-use and more reliable software, with a more modern look, in autumn 2016.

### Case study: Review of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation



Elf Green Meadow (Paul Wilson)

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) are the best wildlife sites in the borough, identified using criteria published by the Mayor of London, and receive protection from harmful development under the Local Plan. There are 35 SINCs in Tower Hamlets, designated at Metropolitan, Borough (grades 1 and 2) and Local levels. They were last reviewed in 2011, so, with consultation on a revised Local Plan due in late 2016, it was agreed to review the SINCs in summer 2016.

The review was led by the Biodiversity Officer, with the help of the Tower Habitats steering group. The review covered all existing SINCs and a few potential additional sites suggested by steering group members. The Biodiversity Officer surveyed those sites that he had not visited recently, and assessed all the sites against the criteria.

The review found relatively little change from 2011. One new SINC was identified – Elf Green, where EastendHomes has created a meadow (see photo above and read more [here](#)). Poplar Dock SINC was extended to include areas of rough ground along the east of the dock, where there is a large population of Jersey Cudweed and other rare wild flowers. Millwall Park, Poplar Dock and Hermitage Basin were upgraded from Local to Borough Importance. On the downside, several areas of West India Dock have been lost to development, as has wasteland beside Blackwall Basin.

The report on the SINC review will form part of the consultation on the Local Plan, and changes will be formalised when the new Local Plan is adopted. See more information about SINCs in the borough [here](#) and more about the review [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” column for completed projects.

**Table 1: Progress towards LBAP targets, October 2016**

Objective	Target	Units	Total completed	Total identified but not completed	Still to identify	% completed	% identified
Grassland enhanced	1.0	hectares	0.31	0.73	0	31.1	104.4
New meadow	1.0	hectares	0.037	1.95	0	3.7	199.2
New chalk meadow		hectares	0.06	0.17			
Restore chalk grassland	0.25	hectares	0.00	0.08	0.17	0.0	30.0
New Open Mosaic Habitat	1.00	hectares	0.0005	4.27	0	0.1	426.9
Woodland enhanced	5.00	hectares	1.15	1.55	2.33	22.9	53.9
New native woodland	0.20	hectares	0.62	0.10	0	308.1	357.2
New orchard	0.50	hectares	0.12	0.03	0.35	23.4	29.4
New hedge	0.50	kilometres	0.17	0.79	0	33.2	191.0
River enhanced	0.20	kilometres	0.00	0.57	0	0.0	282.5
Canal enhanced	0.25	kilometres	0.42	0.28	0	166.8	279.6
Dock enhanced	5	sites	1	7	0	20.0	160.0
New pond	5	ponds	8	4	0	160.0	240.0
Reed bed enhanced	0.10	hectares	0.02	0.00	0.08	19.2	19.2
New reed bed	0.25	hectares	0.02	0.13	0.10	6.2	60.8
Bat box	20	sites	6	27	0	30.0	165.0
Night-scented plants		sites	2	7			



Objective	Target	Units	Total completed	Total identified but not completed	Still to identify	% completed	% identified
Hedgehog home		sites	1	2			
Otter holts	2	sites	0	1	1	0.0	50.0
Black redstart box	5	sites	0	13	0	0.0	260.0
Tern rafts	10	rafts	3	9	0	30.0	120.0
Artificial House Martin nests	5	sites	0	5	0	0.0	100.0
Sparrow terrace	20	sites	3	22	0	15.0	125.0
New dense climbers		sites	1	10			
Kingfisher bank	3	banks	1	5	0	33.3	200.0
Peregrine box	5	sites	0	1	4	0.0	20.0
Sand Martin bank	3	banks	0	2	1	0.0	66.7
Swift box	15	sites	0	24	0	0.0	160.0
Terrestrial habitat around pond		sites	2	2			
Eel pass	1	sites	0	0	1	0.0	0.0
Plant buckthorn	25	sites	4	11	10	16.0	60.0
Plant birdsfoot trefoil	10	sites	4	44	0	40.0	480.0
Plant nectar-rich flowers	50	sites	81	60		162.0	352.0
Bee box/insect hotel	20	sites	3	16	1	15.0	95.0
Loggery	15	sites	14	12	0	93.3	173.3
Plant black poplar	25	trees	8	14	3	32.0	88.0

## Discussion

It is still 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 targets for new native woodland, canal enhancement, new ponds and planting nectar-rich flowers for pollinators have already been exceeded. For a further 16 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 one objective, to install an eel pass, has no clearly identified project, though there has been some discussion around possible sites. Only four other targets have less than 50% of the total target identified in projects: chalk grassland restoration, new orchards, reed bed enhancement and peregrine boxes. Working with relevant partners to encourage projects to achieve these targets should be a high priority for the next couple of years.

There is still some uncertainty around the figures for projects that have been identified but not completed, especially those to be delivered through the development management process. It does now seem clear, however, that London City island and Wood Wharf will deliver a very high proportion of the target for new open mosaic habitats, along with many other enhancements, within the lifetime of the current LBAP. Ongoing difficulties with monitoring progress of new developments mean that some enhancements that have already been completed are currently still recorded as pending, and thus progress on many targets is probably ahead of the figures in Table 1.

Uncertainty still exists over the re-landscaping of Bartlett Park, with the detailed planting scheme yet to be finalised. This is expected to deliver significant proportions of the identified new native hedge and new meadow. However, the identification of other projects should ensure that these targets are met even if the final landscape scheme for Bartlett Park delivers less of these habitats than expected.

## **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, Clarion Housing Group, 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 2016):

John Archer (LBTH Biodiversity Officer, Chair)  
John Swindells (local resident, Vice-Chair)  
Derek Barclay (Clarion Housing Group)  
Allan Cousens (local resident)  
Lydia Davis (Trees for Cities)  
Sam Dundas-Dunbar (LBTH Clean & Green Volunteer Co-ordinator)  
Ben Fenton (Thames21)  
Tom Davis (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)  
Harriet Peacock (LBTH Development Management)  
Mohammed Raja (LBTH Parks)  
Stephen Rodgers (Metropolitan Police Borough Wildlife Crime Officer)  
Sri Sudhaker (LBTH Strategic Planning)  
Jonathan Taylor (LBTH Sustainable Development Team)  
Matthew Twohig (LBTH Green Team)  
Selina Uddin (East London Business Alliance)  
Bob Watts (Gateway Housing Association)  
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: Nick Golson, Katherine O'Brien.

**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](mailto:john.archer@towerhamlets.gov.uk))**