

Review of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Tower Hamlets 2023

Background

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) is the term applied to non-statutory local wildlife sites in London. They are identified in a four-tier system: Sites of Metropolitan Importance, Borough Importance (Grades 1 and 2) and Local Importance. More information, including guidance on the identification of SINCs, can be found on [the Mayor of London's website](#).

SINCs in Tower Hamlets were most recently reviewed in 2016. Government guidance on local wildlife sites (DEFRA 2006) recommends that sites are reviewed every 5-10 years. It was agreed to review the SINCs in 2022-3 as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan review, so that the revised Policies Map includes up to date SINCs.

Methodology and coverage

The review was undertaken by the Council's Biodiversity Officer, John Archer, who has over 30 years' experience of survey and evaluation of nature conservation sites in London. Resources were not available to undertake a full resurvey of all open space in the borough, or even a full resurvey of all SINCs. Existing SINCs which have been visited by the Biodiversity Officer regularly over the last few years, and/or for which large numbers of species records have been received in the last few years, were assessed without additional site visits. Existing SINCs for which little up-to-date information was available, and sites identified by members of the Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Partnership as being potential new SINCs, were visited once during the field season in 2022 or 2023. Details of habitats were recorded, along with significant higher plants, birds and readily-identifiable invertebrates. All sites included in the review were assessed according to the criteria set out by the Mayor of London.

Consultation

Draft recommendations (see Appendix 1) were drawn up by the Biodiversity Officer. They were circulated to relevant Council officers and to members of the Steering Group of the Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Partnership. The draft proposals were discussed at a meeting of the Steering Group in October 2023, and approved with minor revisions. The group of people who considered the draft proposals included the following:

Aleksandra Milentijevic (LBTH Planning, EIA Officer)
Anna Gibbs (LBTH Local Plan team)
Michael Hime (Head of LBTH Green Team)
Mohammed Raja (LBTH Parks lead officer for biodiversity)
Kenneth Greenway (Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park)
Terry Lyle (all-round naturalist and acknowledged expert on Tower Hamlets wildlife)
Matus Holecko (Tower Hamlets Homes lead officer for biodiversity)
Susannah Littlewood (Trees for Cities, Senior Partnerships & Development Coordinator)
Becca Turnpenney (Thames21, Catchment Partnership Development Officer)
John Swindells (local resident and expert botanist)
Fliss Scott (Sustainability Manager, Poplar Harca)
Paul Wilson (Community Engagement Manager, EastendHomes)
Cath Patrick (Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, Conservation Manager)

Summary of recommendations

Code	Name	Change
M006	London's Canals	no change
M031	The River Thames & Bow Creek	no change
M071	Lea Valley	no change
M117	Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park	no change
M133	Mudchute Park and Farm	no change
M157	Mile End Park	no change
THBI01	The Greenway in Tower Hamlets	no change
THBI02	Victoria Park	no change
THBI04	East India Dock Basin	no change
THBI09	Spitalfields City Farm & Allen Gardens	No change
THBII01	Millwall and West India Docks	boundary change
THBII03	Bethnal Green Nature Reserve	no change
THBII04	Cable Street Community Garden	no change
THBII05	Stepney City Farm	no change
THBII07	London Wall & wall of the Tower of London	no change
THBII11	Pinchin Street Disused Railway	no change
THBII12	Weavers Fields	no change
THBII13	Shadwell & Hermitage Basins, Wapping Wood & Wapping Canals	boundary change
THBII14	Blackwall Basin	no change
THBII15	Millwall Park	no change
THBII16	Poplar Dock Marina	no change
<i>THBII17</i>	<i>Saffron Avenue Pond</i>	<i>downgraded to Local – now THL31</i>
THBII18	Swedenborg Gardens	upgraded from Local – see THL08
THL01	St George in the East Church Gardens	no change
THL03	Fairfoot Road Wood	no change
THL04	Ion Square Gardens	no change
<i>THL08</i>	<i>Swedenborg Gardens</i>	<i>upgraded to BII – now THBII18</i>
THL12	Perring Community Garden	no change
THL13	Disused railway Bow	no change
THL15	St Katharine's Dock	no change
THL17	St Anne's Churchyard, Limehouse	no change
THL23	Cyril Jackson School Nature Area	no change
THL26	Robin Hood Gardens	no change
THL27	Meath Gardens	boundary change
THL31	Saffron Avenue Pond	downgraded from BII – see THBII17
THL32	King Edward Memorial Park	no change
THL33	Elf Green	no change
THL34	Bartlett Park	new SINC

Recommendations site by site

Brief reasons are given for all proposed changes.

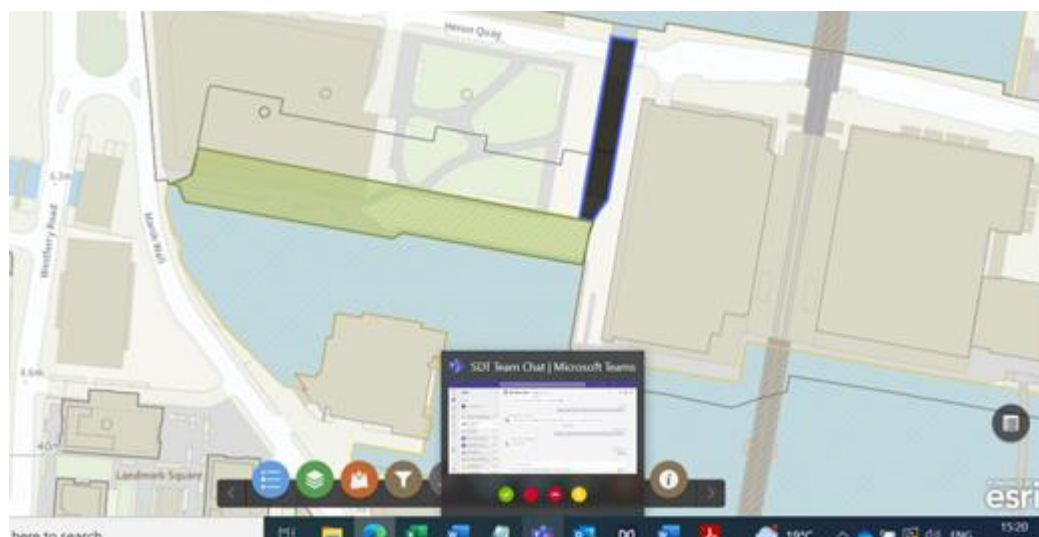
THBII01 Millwall & West India Docks

Small areas of open water in the West India Docks have been lost to development around Heron Quays (see Map 1 below). The area shaded green should have been deleted following the 2016 SINC review, but was inadvertently missed then changing the maps for the Local Plan adopted in 2020. The area outlined in blue and shaded grey is a more recent loss. These areas should be deleted.

The boundary around the SW edge of the Wood Wharf development site was not mapped accurately following the 2016 review, probably due to the lack of an up to date base map. It requires correcting (see Map 2 below). The correct boundary follows the green line – this is all following the dock edge except where it goes under the road bridge.

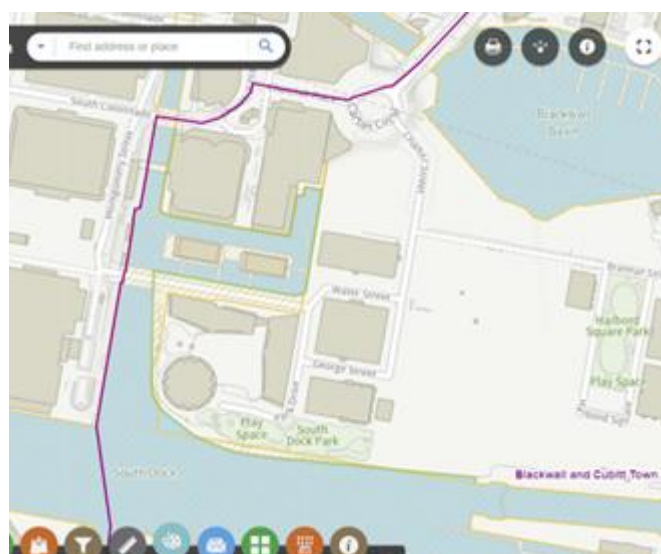
Revise boundary

Map 1 - THBII01 West India Docks (proposed deletions)



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Map 2 – THBII01 West India Docks (boundary correction)



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THBII13 Shadwell & Hermitage Basins, Wapping Wood & Wapping Canals

The boundary drawn following the 2016 SINC review inadvertently omitted the section of canal between Shadwell basin and Wapping Wood, and the adjacent narrow strip of scrub and woodland. This forms an important link in between the basin and Wapping Wood, and should have been included in the enlarged site (see Map 3 below)

Revise boundary

Map 3 – THBII13 Shadwell Basin & Wapping Wood (proposed addition outlined in brown)



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THBII17 Saffron Avenue Pond

This site was first notified in the 2011 review and upgraded from local to Borough Grade 2 in 2016 due to its diverse damselfly and dragonfly (Odonata) population. However, excessive use of dye in the water in the last three or four years has led to a big decrease in macrophytes, and a consequential decline in Odonata. A visit on a sunny day in August 2023 found no damselflies at all, just two Emperor Dragonflies. Without the diverse assemblage of Odonata, the site is of no more than Local importance

Downgrade to Local. Reverts to its previous number of THL31.

THL08 Swedenborg Gardens

Since the 2016 review, this site has undergone several habitat enhancements, largely by the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. An enlarged meadow on the mound is now well-established, and management has enhanced the woodland in the north of the park. The sandy grassland still supports regionally-rare plants including Toothed Medick. The orchard, the largest in the borough, is maturing nicely with meadow beneath well-managed fruit trees. Overall, the site is now of more than local importance.

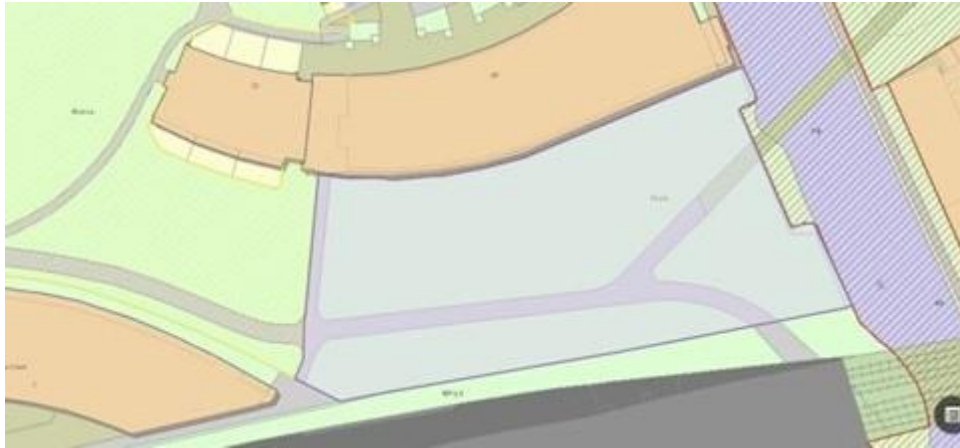
Upgrade to Borough Grade 2. Becomes THBII18.

THL27 Meath Gardens

The eastern extension of this park to the canal was agreed to be added to the SINC in the 2011 SINC review, but inadvertently has never been added to the site on Local Plan maps. It should be added to the SINC (see Map 4 overleaf). Habitat enhancements led by the Friends of Meath Gardens in recent years have increased the ecological value of the site. When the hedges and orchard mature, it is likely to merit upgrade to Borough Grade 2 Importance. However, it is considered that it does not quite merit the upgrade yet.

Revise boundary

Map 4 – THL27 Meath Gardens (proposed addition outlined in purple)



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New Local Site Bartlett Park

This sizeable park (see Map 4 below) was relandscaped in 2020-22 with extensive new meadow areas, nectar-rich perennial planting and several Black Poplars planted along with other native trees. It is strategically situated beside the Limehouse Cut. It clearly meets the criteria for a Site of Local Importance and, once the meadows have matured, it may well become a Borough Grade 2 site.

Add as a new Site of Local Importance. Becomes THL34

Map 4 – THL34 Bartlett Park (new SINC)



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Other sites considered

The following additional sites were considered in the review, but judged not currently to meet the criteria for SINC designation:

Stepney Green: the northern Crossrail meadow is nice, though it includes a high proportion of non-natives, having been created using Wildflower Turf “Native Enriched”. The southern Crossrail meadow was annual and has little left, but a good population of *Trifolium arvense* suggests potential. The rest of park has little biodiversity interest. Should be reassessed in the next review.

Shandy Park: lots of meadow creation and wildlife-friendly planting around edges. Meadows not well established, few wildflowers surviving and dominated by *Hordeum murinum*. Might become a Local site in future but meadows not well enough established yet.

Poplar Park: new meadow created in 2019 is fairly well established, but there is little else of nature conservation value in the park, except one fairly small black poplar. The meadow is probably not enough to make the whole park a SINC, though could be a stand-alone SINC in a few years if well established.

Appendix 1: Draft proposals presented to LBAP Steering Group

Sites of Metropolitan Importance

M006 London's Canals: Fairly regular bird records. Londonwide site. NO CHANGE

M031 The River Thames & Bow Creek: regular bird records. Londonwide site. NO CHANGE

M071 Lea Valley: Fairly regular bird records. Multi-borough site. NO CHANGE

M117 Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park: very well-recorded. NO CHANGE

M133 Mudchute Park & Farm: well-recorded and visited frequently. NO CHANGE

M157 Mile End Park: well-recorded and visited frequently. NO CHANGE

Sites of Borough Importance, Grade 1

THBI01 The Greenway in Tower Hamlets: Surveyed in 2023. The sides are scrub – a reasonable diversity of mostly native species. The top is grassland, with a 2 metre strip either side of the path mown short, and the rest managed as slightly rough meadow. This has a good diversity of wild flowers. It is not of Borough 1 importance on its own, but never really was. The Borough 1 designation is a reflection of the importance of the whole Greenway, most of which is in Newham, where it is definitely Borough 1, and it seems consistent for the whole site to have the same value across the borough boundary. NO CHANGE

THBI02 Victoria Park: well-recorded and visited frequently. NO CHANGE

THBI04 East India Dock Basin: very well-recorded and visited frequently. NO CHANGE

THBI09 Spitalfields City Farm & Allen Gardens: farm visited a few times, most recently 2022. Well-managed with some recent enhancements. Great Crested Newts still present. Allen Gardens due for re-landscaping. NO CHANGE

Sites of Borough Importance, Grade 2

THBII01 Millwall & West India Docks: regular bird records. Grassland area to be surveyed and still has high coverage of forbs and sizeable population of Restharrow. Small further losses of parts of West India Docks, and boundary needs correction in places. **REVISE BOUNDARY**

THBII03 Bethnal Green Nature Reserve: visited frequently, well-managed with recent enhancements, but probably too small for Borough Grade 1. NO CHANGE

THBII04 Cable Street Community Garden: visited at least annually, well-managed with some recent enhancements. NO CHANGE

THBII05 Stepney City Farm: Surveyed in 2022: recently created meadow and pond establishing well, generally well-managed. Need to check boundary, otherwise NO CHANGE

THBII07 London Wall and the wall of the Tower of London: London Rocket still present on London Wall in July 2022. NO CHANGE

THBII11 Pinchin Street Disused Railway: appears unchanged from passing trains. NO CHANGE

THBII12 Weavers Fields: woodland well-managed with some enhancements. Visited regularly. NO CHANGE

THBII13 Shadwell & Hermitage Basins, Wapping Wood & Wapping Canals: visited frequently, well-managed with recent enhancements to canal. **CORRECT BOUNDARY TO INCLUDE WATERCOURSE BETWEEN SHADWELL BASIN AND WAPPING WOOD**

THBII14 Blackwall Basin: regular bird records. Terns still nest occasionally and new rafts to come. NO CHANGE

THBII15 Millwall Park: significant enhancements. NO CHANGE

THBII16 Poplar Dock: regular bird records, including breeding Great Crested Grebe and Tufted Duck. Botanically interesting around east and north edges with huge population of Jersey Cudweed. NO CHANGE

THBII17 Saffron Avenue Pond: appears to have declined in value for Odonata in the last couple of years since use of dye in the water has significantly reduced the amount of submerged macrophytes. No damselflies at all were seen on a day of good weather in August 2023, and probably now of no more than Local importance. **DOWNGRADE TO LOCAL (would revert to THL31)**

Sites of Local Importance

THL01 St George in the East Church Gardens: surveyed in 2022: old meadows have declined but new meadow created. Further enhancements likely. NO CHANGE

THL03 Old Railway at Fairfoot Road: surveyed in 2022: has been subject of major restoration, knotweed controlled, canopy thinned, meadows created, paths added. Might be considered for upgrade to Borough 2? **OPINIONS SOUGHT ON UPGRADE** [The consensus at the Steering Group meeting was that it would be premature to upgrade this site now, but it should be reassessed in the next review]

THL04 Ion Square Gardens: surveyed 2022: meadows well-established, orchard and native trees planted. NO CHANGE

THL08 Swedenborg Gardens: Surveyed 2022 and 2023. Significant enhancement by FoTHCP. Meadow looking good in places, thought parts need a spring cut and perhaps further seeding. Woodland has had management to improve it. Sandy grassland still supports *Medicago polymorpha* and lots of *Trifolium arvense*. Orchard in excellent condition and is the largest in the borough. **UPGRADE TO BOROUGH 2**

THL12 Cameron (Perring) Community Garden: Not visited but looks unchanged on Google Earth. NO CHANGE

THL13 Disused railway Bow: no access gained so surveyed from roadside. Little change since 2016. Still sycamore-dominated woodland. The boundary could be altered to remove active gardens, based on OS base map and aerial photos, but it is not clear whether the gardens are encroaching onto land that they shouldn't, and there has been no obvious change since 2016. NO CHANGE?

THL15 St Katharine's Dock: visited at least annually, some recent enhancements. NO CHANGE

THL17 St Anne's Churchyard, Limehouse: the Black Poplar is still there, good diversity of spring bulbs. NO CHANGE

THL23 Cyril Jackson School Nature Area: not visited, but looks unchanged on Google Earth, and the school website makes a feature of the nature garden. NO CHANGE

THL26 Robin Hood Gardens: the habitats are little changed since 2016. Soon to be enhanced in the estate regeneration. NO CHANGE

THL27 Meath Gardens: 1 mature Black Poplar still there, several recently-planted ones doing well. Lots of habitat enhancement, including hedges and woodland creation. Meadow in need of work. Close to Borough 2 upgrade but probably not quite yet. Current boundary erroneously omits extension to canal. CORRECT BOUNDARY

THL32 King Edward Memorial Park: Surveyed 2022: Meadow extremely good, one of the best in the borough. Daisy Earthstar area very overgrown. Works by Tideway planned. Might be worth Borough 2 status if earthstar is still present but too early to know. NO CHANGE

Additional sites considered

Stepney Green: the northern Crossrail meadow is nice, though it includes a high proportion of non-natives, having been created using Wildflower Turf “Native Enriched”. The southern Crossrail meadow was annual and has little left, but a good population of *Trifolium arvense* suggests potential. Rest of park not particularly interesting. Could consider adding northern meadow to adjacent Stepney City Farm SINC but that is probably premature. NOT A SINC

Shandy Park: lots of meadow creation and wildlife-friendly planting around edges. Meadows not well established, few wildflowers surviving and dominated by *Hordeum murinum*. Might become a Local site in future but meadows not well enough established yet. NOT A SINC

Bartlett Park: extensive areas of meadow planted, in varying condition but most not too bad with at least a reasonable diversity of wildflowers established. A few black poplars planted. **DESIGNATE AS NEW LOCAL SITE**

Poplar Rec: new meadow created in 2019 is fairly well established, but there is little else of nature conservation value in the park, except one fairly small black poplar. The meadow is probably not enough to make the whole park a SINC, though could be a stand alone SINC in a few years if well established. PROBABLY NOT A SINC