



Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2024



Foreword by John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

I am very pleased to adopt the Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan for 2019-24, which has been produced by Tower Habitats, our biodiversity partnership.

It may come as a surprise to some people that we have so much biodiversity in Tower Hamlets. Our buildings are home to rare birds such as the Peregrine Falcon and the Black Redstart. And despite being one of the most densely-populated places in the country, we have some very special wild places, such as Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Mudchute Park & Farm and Mile End Park.

It is very important that we continue to protect and enhance our biodiversity, not only for its own sake but also to ensure people who live and work in Tower Hamlets have the opportunity to enjoy contact with nature. This action plan clearly sets out what the council, registered housing providers, developers, community groups and residents can do to help conserve and enhance the important habitats and species in Tower Hamlets.

I look forward to working together with our partners to protect and enhance our environment.

Foreword by Cllr David Edgar, Cabinet Member for Environment

Our biodiversity partnership, Tower Habitats, can be very proud of its achievements over the last few years. This new Local Biodiversity Action Plan builds on the successes of the last plan, which was adopted in 2014. During those five years, a huge amount was achieved for biodiversity in the borough, including:

- creation and enhancement of over two hectares of flower-rich grassland;
- planting of 8,000 square metres of native woodland and 5000 square metres of orchards;
- 12 new ponds in schools and community gardens;
- around 1.5km of reed bed and other wetland vegetation created along canals and rivers;
- over two hectares of biodiverse green roofs on new buildings – Tower Hamlets has a greater area of green roofs than any other London borough.

In addition, Mile End Park and Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park are recognised as leading examples of how to manage urban parks to produce a wealth of wild plants and animals, and a fantastic experience of nature for our residents and visitors. All this was recognised in 2018, when Tower Hamlets won the Biodiversity Award in the London in Bloom Awards.

This new plan demonstrates our continuing commitment to ensuring that Tower Hamlets becomes an even greener and more environmentally-friendly borough. It is crucial for us to conserve the environment around us, and it also makes the borough a more colourful and vibrant place to live.

Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2024

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Tower Hamlets is a densely built-up inner London borough. It nevertheless supports a surprising diversity of wild plants and animals in a range of habitats. These include protected species such as bats and the Black Redstart, and a number of rare invertebrates associated with brownfield land, such as the Brown-banded Carder Bee and Streaked Bombardier Beetle. There are two Local Nature Reserves in the borough at Mudchute and Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. Both of these are also recognised as Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation, along with Mile End Park, the River Thames, the River Lea and the canals. The east of the borough lies within the Lea Catchment Nature Improvement Area.
- 1.2 This Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) has been produced by the Tower Hamlets biodiversity partnership, known as Tower Habitats¹. This includes Tower Hamlets Council, Tower Hamlets Homes, social housing providers, local and Londonwide voluntary and community groups, businesses and local residents. All of these groups and individuals will be involved in implementation of the LBAP. This LBAP replaces previous LBAPs published in 2003, 2009 and 2014.
- 1.3 The plan identifies priority habitats and species in Tower Hamlets, and sets objectives and, where appropriate, targets for what needs to be done to ensure their conservation. This will inform the implementation of projects and actions by partner organisations. It also provides guidance to developers on the kinds of biodiversity enhancements expected in new developments. The LBAP does not include detailed actions. These will be developed throughout the five-year duration of the LBAP, and will be monitored and reported on in annual reports published on the Council's² and Tower Habitats³ websites.

Box 1: What is biodiversity and why is it important?

Biodiversity is the variety of life – the myriad species of plants and animals on earth and the range of habitats where they live. It also includes the genetic variation within species. Biodiversity includes elephants, sparrows and bluebells; woodlands, rivers and grassland.

There are many reasons why we should conserve biodiversity. It is important for its own sake, and most people agree that we have a moral duty to protect the other species of animals and plants with which we share this planet. It is important for people – most of us enjoy seeing flowers, hearing birdsong and being in natural places, and there is clear evidence that contact with nature is beneficial to our physical and mental wellbeing. Biodiversity also provides economic and functional benefits, such as pollination, flood risk reduction and local climate amelioration. These functional benefits will become increasingly important as climate change leads to more frequent extreme weather events.

1.4 Structure of the LBAP

- 1.4.1 The LBAP includes background information on how it fits in with other Council policies and initiatives, and with national and London-wide biodiversity plans. It then identifies priority habitats and species, setting objectives and, where appropriate, targets for each. Finally, there are four action plans.
- 1.4.2 Biodiversity Action Plans are generally made up of a series of habitat action plans and species action plans for each of the priority habitats and species. In Tower Hamlets, we have found it more useful to divide our LBAP into four action plans

¹ Tower Habitats website www.towerhabitats.org

² https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/environment_and_waste/sustainability/biodiversity.aspx

³ <https://www.towerhabitats.org/your-habitats/the-local-biodiversity-action-plan/>

based around the major land uses in the borough: the built environment; gardens and grounds; rivers and standing water; and parks, squares and burial grounds.

- 1.4.3 Each action plan lists the priority species and habitats relevant to the plan. It then sets out what the key stakeholders can do to achieve the objectives and targets for these species and habitats, and what will be done to raise awareness of biodiversity. More detailed guidance for stakeholders (including developers) on how to deliver objectives for each priority habitat and species will be published separately on the Council's and Tower Habitats websites.
- 1.4.4 The action plans do not include lists of detailed actions that will be undertaken to achieve the objectives and targets. These will be identified throughout the life of the plan and entered and reported on in annual reports published on the Council's⁴ and Tower Habitats websites⁵.



This beautiful meadow at Approach Gardens was created under the 2014-19 LBAP

⁴ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/environment_and_waste/sustainability/biodiversity.aspx

⁵ <https://www.towerhabitats.org/your-habitats/the-local-biodiversity-action-plan/>

2 Background

2.1 Relationship with other biodiversity action plans and strategies

2.1.1 A wide range of European, national, regional and local legislation, policy and guidance has a bearing on biodiversity conservation. Full details of these are available on the Tower Habitats website⁶ and it is not necessary to detail them here, as this LBAP has no direct bearing on their implementation.

2.1.2 Action for biodiversity in Tower Hamlets can contribute to London-wide and national targets for priority species and habitats. These priorities and targets are, therefore, an important factor in setting our local priorities. Tables 1 (page 10) and 2 (page 14) indicate which Tower Hamlets priority habitats and species are also national and London priorities.

2.1.3 National

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan has been replaced by national biodiversity strategies for England, Wales and Scotland. *Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services* (DEFRA 2011)⁷ has moved away from the habitat- and species-based approach and clearly-defined targets of a biodiversity action plan, and concentrates instead on landscape-scale conservation, with an overall target of halting biodiversity loss by 2020. National priority habitats and species are defined in the list of Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England⁸, identified under Section 41 of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006⁹.

2.1.4 London

Priority habitats¹⁰ and species¹¹ in London have been identified by the London Biodiversity Partnership. There are London action plans in place for the habitats and a few of the species. The London Environment Strategy¹² sets targets for creation of new species-rich woodland, flower-rich grassland and reed beds, and enhancement of rivers and streams, by 2025 and 2050.

2.1.5 Other local BAPs

At least three major landowners within the borough have their own biodiversity action plans. The eastern edge of Tower Hamlets lies within the Lee Valley Regional Park, which has published the Lee Valley Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2029¹³. This is soon to be updated. Canary Wharf Ltd published a revised corporate biodiversity action plan¹⁴ in 2018 for its estate on the Isle of Dogs. The north-eastern corner of the borough lies within the Legacy Communities Scheme from the 2012 Olympics, for which the London Legacy Development Corporation has produced the Legacy Communities Scheme Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2019¹⁵, which is due to be updated in 2019. Tables 1 and 2 indicate which Tower Hamlets priority habitats and species are also priorities in these three BAPs.

⁶ <https://www.towerhabitats.org/planning-resources/>

⁷ [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services](#) (DEFRA 2011)

⁸ [Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England](#) (Secretary of State for Environment, Farming & Rural Affairs 2010)

⁹ [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#)

¹⁰ [London's BAP priority habitats](#) (London Biodiversity Partnership)

¹¹ [London's BAP priority species](#) (London Biodiversity Partnership)

¹² [The London Environment Strategy](#) (Mayor of London 2018)

¹³ [Lee Valley Regional Park Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2029](#) (LVRPA 2019)

¹⁴ [Canary Wharf Group Biodiversity Action Plan 2018-2028](#) (Canary Wharf Group 2018)

¹⁵ [Legacy Communities Scheme Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2019](#) (London Legacy Development Corporation 2013)

2.2 Relationship to other policies and plans in Tower Hamlets

The LBAP directly affects the implementation of Tower Hamlets Council's planning policy and other Council plans and strategies including the Strategic Plan, Tower Hamlets Green Grid, Open Space Strategy, Sustainable Urban Drainage Guidance and Air Quality Action Plan.

2.2.1 Strategic Plan

Biodiversity is recognised as being important in the Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2021. It is one of five key themes within the strategic outcome "People live in a borough that is clean and green", which sits under the strategic priority "A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in". The strategic measures monitored under the biodiversity theme are directly linked to this LBAP. The four strategic measures are:

- area of priority wildlife habitat created or enhanced at ground level;
- area of biodiverse green roofs delivered through new developments;
- proportion of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in active management; and
- number of biodiversity enhancement projects involving residents, community groups and volunteers.

2.2.2 Planning Policy

Planning Policy in Tower Hamlets is set out in the Local Plan. The two main Development Plan Documents, the Core Strategy (adopted 2010)¹⁶ and the Managing Development Document (adopted 2013)¹⁷, both contain policies seeking to protect and enhance biodiversity. Policy SP04, part 3, in the adopted Core Strategy seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity value through the design of open space and buildings and ensuring development protects and enhances areas of biodiversity value in order to achieve a net gain in biodiversity. The more detailed Policy DM11 in the Managing Development Document includes two direct references to the LBAP. Clause 3 provides protection in planning to the priority species identified in the LBAP, and clause 4 indicates that biodiversity enhancements in major developments should contribute to the objectives in the LBAP. To assist developers in this, each action plan sets out details of how developers can contribute to the objectives and targets in this LBAP.

2.2.3 The Local Plan will be updated in January 2020. The Core Strategy and Managing Development Document will be replaced by a single Local Plan 2031¹⁸. The new Local Plan has completed its Examination in Public (EiP), and the Inspector's report is awaited. The key policies relating to biodiversity are strategic policy S.ES1 on protecting and enhancing our environment and policy D.ES3 on urban greening and biodiversity (see Box 2 overleaf).

2.2.4 Strategic policy S.ES1 states that "Proposals will be supported that work to minimise the use of natural resources and seek proactively to protect and enhance the natural environment through protecting and enhancing biodiversity, with the aims of meeting the objectives of the latest Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan and Thames River Basin Management Plan and improving opportunities to experience nature, especially in deficient areas".

¹⁶ [Core Strategy Development Plan Document](#) (LB Tower Hamlets 2010)

¹⁷ [Managing Development Document Development Plan Document](#) (LB Tower Hamlets 2013)

¹⁸ [Tower Hamlets Local Plan 2031 latest version](#) (LB Tower Hamlets 2018)

Box 2: Policy D.ES3 Urban greening and biodiversity

- 1 Development is required to protect and enhance biodiversity, through:
 - a maximising the provision of 'living building' elements*
 - b retaining existing habitats and features of biodiversity value or, if this is not possible, replacing them within the development, as well as incorporating additional measures to enhance biodiversity**, proportionate to the development proposed, and
 - c protecting and increasing the provision of trees, through:
 - i protecting all trees, including street trees
 - ii incorporating native trees, wherever possible
 - iii providing replacement trees, including street trees, where the loss of or impact on trees in a development is considered acceptable.
- 2 Major development is required to submit an ecology assessment demonstrating biodiversity enhancements that contribute to the objectives of the latest Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan and the Thames River Basin Management Plan.
- 3 Planting and landscaping around developments must not include 'potentially invasive non-native species'. Invasive non-native species listed in schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) must be controlled, and eradicated where possible, as part of redevelopment.
- 4 Development must not negatively impact on any designated European site such as Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation or Ramsar sites. Developments which might have the potential to adversely impact a Special Protection Area or Special Area of Conservation outside the borough will be required to submit a Habitat Regulations Assessment.
- 5 Developments which affect a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, or significantly harm the population or conservation status of a protected or priority species***, are required to be managed in accordance with the following hierarchy:
 - a Adverse impacts to the biodiversity interest should be avoided.
 - b Where avoidance is not possible, proposals must minimise and mitigate the impact to the biodiversity interest.
 - c As a last resort for exceptional cases where the benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the biodiversity impacts, appropriate compensation will be sought.
 - d Where appropriate compensation is not possible, planning permission will be refused.

* Explanatory paragraph 14.21 states that in implementing part 1 (a) 'living building' elements need to contribute to local biodiversity through providing priority habitats, and/or features for priority species, as identified in the latest Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

** Explanatory paragraph 14.24 states that the latest Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan should give details of priority habitats and/or features for priority species.

*** Paragraph 14.28 states that priority species include those identified in the Tower Hamlets Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

2.2.5 Greater detail of what is required of developers is provided by policy D.ES3. This new policy includes several references to the LBAP. Clause 5 provides protection in planning to the priority species identified in the LBAP. Clauses 1a and 1b seek to maximise living building elements, such as green roofs, biodiversity enhancements; the accompanying explanation states that these should contribute to priority habitats and species identified in the LBAP. Clause 2 indicates that biodiversity enhancements in major developments should contribute to the objectives in the

LBAP. To assist developers in this, each action plan sets out details of how developers can contribute to the objectives and targets in this LBAP.

2.2.6 Other Local Plan policies provide useful hooks that support LBAP implementation. Strategic policies S.OWS1 on creating a network of open spaces and S.OWS2 on enhancing the network of water spaces both seek enhancements in line with the LBAP. Policy D.OWS3 states that new open space within strategic developments should enhance biodiversity, contributing to objectives identified in the LBAP. Similarly, policy D.OSW4 on water spaces requires developments within or adjacent to water spaces to enhance the biodiversity of the water space in line with the LBAP. Policy D.ES4 on flood risk requires buffer strips alongside rivers, and optimising opportunities to realign or set back defences and improve the riverside frontage to provide amenity space and environmental enhancement.

2.2.7 Tower Hamlets Green Grid

The Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy¹⁹ is the Council's strategy to create an interlinked network of high quality, multifunctional, accessible, green open spaces and waterways in Tower Hamlets that will encourage active lifestyles and improve quality of life. Improving biodiversity is one of the key principles that influence public health outcomes through promotion of healthier behaviours, active communities, improved community safety and environmental exposure. The Green Grid offers a delivery mechanism to provide the connectivity of habitats which is an important element of biodiversity conservation. The priorities in this LBAP will guide the biodiversity enhancement to be delivered through Green Grid projects.

2.2.8 Open Space Strategy

The Council's Open Space Strategy²⁰ provides an assessment of the quality and quantity of open space in the borough, in the context of the views, needs and expectations of residents and an analysis of current and future local demand for open space, and outlines an action plan for parks and open spaces covering the first five years of the strategy. The Strategy recognises that enhancing biodiversity, contributing to the objectives identified in the LBAP, is a key role of existing and new open spaces.

2.2.9 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) Guidance

The Council's guidance on sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS)²¹ recognises that, in addition to their primary purpose of reducing flood risk, SuDS can and should provide biodiversity enhancements. It states that these should be guided by local priorities identified in the LBAP.

2.2.10 Air Quality Action Plan

One of the key priority work areas in the Air Quality Action Plan²² is investing and encouraging new technologies and planting systems which can tackle air quality. There could be overlaps where planting can deliver biodiversity and air quality benefits.

¹⁹ [Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy: Update 2017](#) (LB Tower Hamlets 2017)

²⁰ [Parks & Open Spaces: An open space strategy for The London Borough of Tower Hamlets 2017-2027](#) (LB Tower Hamlets 2017)

²¹ [London Borough of Tower Hamlets – SuDS Guidance](#) (LB Tower Hamlets 2014)

²² [London Borough of Tower Hamlets Air Quality Action Plan 2017-2022](#) (LB Tower Hamlets 2017)

2.3 Management and monitoring

- 2.3.1 Implementation and monitoring of the LBAP is overseen by a Steering Group. This is chaired by the Council's Biodiversity Officer and includes representatives of relevant Council departments (including Parks, Development Management, Public Health, Clean & Green, Infrastructure Delivery and Strategic Planning), Tower Hamlets Homes, other social housing providers (currently Poplar HARCA, Gateway Housing Association, Clarion Housing and EastendHomes), environmental groups (currently Friends of Meath Gardens, Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Mudchute Association, Thames21 and Trees for Cities) and local residents.
- 2.3.2 The Biodiversity Officer will keep a record of all projects, including planning applications, which contribute to LBAP objectives and targets. The Steering Group will publish an annual report detailing progress on implementation of the LBAP and progress against all the objectives and targets. These annual reports will be available on the Council's²³ and Tower Habitats²⁴ websites.



Children help to plant a fruit tree in a new orchard at Mudchute

²³ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgn/environment_and_waste/sustainability/biodiversity.aspx

²⁴ <https://www.towerhabitats.org/your-habitats/the-local-biodiversity-action-plan/>

3 Priority habitats and species

3.1 Priority habitats

The following habitats have been identified as priorities for conservation action in Tower Hamlets.

Table 1: Priority habitats	England priority²⁵	London priority²⁶	Lee Valley Priority²⁷	Canary Wharf Priority²⁸	Olympic Legacy Priority²⁹
Flower-rich grassland	some	X	X		X
Open mosaic habitats	X	X	X	biodiverse roofs	X
Native broadleaved woodland		X	X		wet woodland
Orchards	X		X		
Mixed native hedgerows	X				
Rivers	X	X	X		X
Standing water (canals & docks)		canals	X	docks	
Ponds	X	X	X		X
Reed beds	X	X	X		X

3.1.1 Flower-rich grassland



Grassland is widespread in Tower Hamlets, especially in parks and around housing estates. Much of it is amenity grassland, which is short-mown and low in plant diversity, but there are also flower-rich meadows which support a wealth of invertebrates. Most of these have been deliberately created comparatively recently, but there are a few small areas which may be relict older grassland. The most extensive areas of meadow are in Mile End Park, Mudchute and Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. Some of the borough's flower-rich grassland has been created on alkaline substrates such as crushed chalk or crushed concrete. These areas show characteristics of chalk grassland.

²⁵ [Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England](#) (Secretary of State for Environment, Farming & Rural Affairs 2010)

²⁶ [London's BAP priority habitats](#) (London Biodiversity Partnership)

²⁷ [Lee Valley Regional Park Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2029](#) (LVRPA 2019)

²⁸ [Canary Wharf Group Biodiversity Action Plan 2018-2028](#) (Canary Wharf Group 2018)

²⁹ [Legacy Communities Scheme Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2019](#) (London Legacy Development Corporation 2013)

Objectives for flower-rich grassland

- To ensure existing meadows are protected and managed to retain their value.
- To enhance grassland in parks, housing estates and community gardens by planting bulbs and wild flower plugs and seeds. **[Target: 1 hectare]**
- To increase the area of flower-rich grassland by creating new meadows in parks, housing estates, new developments, schools and community gardens on neutral or alkaline substrates. **[Target: 1 hectare]**

3.1.3 Open mosaic habitats



The sparsely-vegetated but flower-rich habitats typical of wasteland or brownfield land support important communities of rare invertebrates as well as the Black Redstart, a specially-protected bird. Now termed “open mosaic habitats on previously developed land”, this is a priority habitat for England. Large areas of this habitat have been lost in recent years as derelict sites are redeveloped, and further losses are inevitable. There is little open mosaic habitat remaining in Tower Hamlets at ground level, though significant amounts are being created on biodiverse roofs. It is not a habitat which readily lends itself to public amenity spaces as, although it can look beautiful when in flower, it is bare and unappealing in winter. It is anticipated that most creation of new open mosaic habitat will be on roofs. Biodiverse roofs should be designed in line with best practice guidance published by Buglife³⁰.

Objectives for open mosaic habitats

- To ensure that, where development leads to the loss of open mosaic habitats, at least an equal area of replacement open mosaic habitat is created.
- To increase the area of open mosaic habitats through creating new habitat on green roofs, within landscaping around industrial developments and, where appropriate, in parks. **[Target: 3 hectares]**

3.1.4 Native broadleaved woodland



³⁰ [Creating green roofs for invertebrates: a best practice guide](#) (Buglife)

There is little woodland in Tower Hamlets, and none of it is ancient woodland. The largest woodland is in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, and there are also significant areas in Mile End Park, Weavers Fields and Mudchute. Little of the woodland in the borough is exclusively native, with Cemetery Park dominated by Sycamore. The priority for woodland is to protect and enhance our existing woods. There is probably little scope for creating any significant new woods in the borough, though there may be opportunities to plant new small groves and copses. While no specific target for woodland creation is included in this LBAP, any such opportunities should be taken. While not strictly woodland, the numerous trees in the borough's parks, streets, housing estates and gardens are an important component of the "urban forest", providing valuable habitat for birds, bats and invertebrates. This is particularly true of native trees and those which are good sources of nectar and/or berries, as well as large trees which provide structural habitat. Managing these trees properly, and planting more in places where they do not harm existing open habitats, will contribute to biodiversity conservation. The Mayor has pledged to plant 1000 extra street trees by 2022.

Objectives for woodland

- To protect existing woodland and manage it to retain its biodiversity value.
- To enhance existing woodlands by gradually increasing the proportion of native trees and shrubs, increasing the diversity of ground flora and/or improving woodland structure. **[Target: 3 hectares]**
- To create new areas of native broadleaved woodland. **[No specific target]**
- To plant more native trees in appropriate places in parks, housing estates and new developments. **[No specific target]** (Projects planting at least three species of native trees on a site will be considered to contribute to this objective provided they do not harm existing flower-rich grassland or other priority habitats).

3.1.5 Orchards



Traditional orchards, composed of fruit and nut trees with meadow beneath, are a valuable habitat, supporting a number of specialist invertebrates. Several small orchards have been planted in Tower Hamlets' parks and housing estates in recent years, as part of the increasing trend for local food growing.

Objectives for orchards

- To manage existing and new orchards to promote their biodiversity value.
- To increase the area of orchards by planting new orchards in parks, housing estates, new developments, schools and community gardens. **[Target: 0.5 hectare]**

3.1.6 Mixed native hedgerows



Hedgerows, especially those made up of a mixture of native shrubs and trees, provide food and shelter for a wide range of animals, and can act as corridors to help plants and animals disperse through the landscape. There are numerous hedges in Tower Hamlets.

Objectives for hedgerows

- To ensure existing hedges are protected and managed to maintain their biodiversity value.
- To increase the length of hedgerows by planting more mixed native hedges in parks, housing estates, schools, gardens (including community gardens) and streets.

[Target: 500 metres]

3.1.7 Rivers



The Thames and Lea respectively form the southern and eastern boundaries of the borough. Both are tidal and have been highly modified, with vertical walls, and both have issues with water quality and invasive non-native species. Nevertheless, they support a wealth of aquatic birds, fish and invertebrates. Providing vegetation such as reed beds along the river walls can improve water quality and habitats for fish and birds. Enhancing tidal rivers is not straightforward, and the difficulty is recognised by the lack of a specific target for river enhancement in this plan. The Thames Estuary Partnership has published guidance on how this can be done³¹. Sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) can also improve water quality through reducing the amount of runoff entering our rivers.

Objectives for rivers

- To enhance rivers by controlling invasive species, providing marginal vegetation on river walls, and encouraging schemes to improve water quality. **[No specific target]**

³¹ [Estuary Edges](#) (Environment Agency/Thames Estuary Partnership)

3.1.8 Standing open water (canals & docks)



Tower Hamlets contains a network of canals, which support populations of aquatic birds, fish, invertebrates and plants. The tow-paths also provide narrow green corridors. Some sections of canal are almost devoid of marginal vegetation. The docks also support fish and water birds, but are even more lacking in vegetation and places for birds to nest. The provision of marginal vegetation through innovative, low maintenance, robust solutions such as suspended gabion structures and suitably specified floating island technologies can address these issues providing they are agreed in advance with the waterway owner.

Objectives for canals and docks

- To maintain the biodiversity value of canals by controlling invasive species.
- To enhance canals by increasing the length of canal with emergent and marginal vegetation. **[Target: 1 kilometre]**
- To enhance docks by providing vegetation on dock walls, floating islands and fish habitat. **[Target: 5 sites]**

3.1.9 Ponds



Ponds are excellent for wildlife, supporting amphibians, dragonflies and many other invertebrates. There are numerous ponds in Tower Hamlets, in parks, community gardens, schools and private gardens.

Objectives for ponds

- To ensure existing ponds are protected and managed to maintain their biodiversity value.
- To increase the number of ponds by creating new ponds in appropriate places in parks, housing estates, community gardens, schools and gardens. **[Target: 5 ponds]**

3.1.10 Reed beds



Reed beds are important for a number of specialist birds and invertebrates. Reed beds in Tower Hamlets are found as intermittent, mostly narrow, fringes along our rivers and canals, with a slightly more extensive area at East India Dock Basin.

Objectives for reed beds

- To ensure existing reed beds are protected and managed to maintain their biodiversity value.
- To enhance reed beds by removing scrub and invasive species. **[No specific target]**
- To increase the area of reed beds by planting new reed beds along rivers, canals and dock walls and on floating islands in the docks. **[Target: 500m²]**

3.2 Priority species

The conservation of species is generally best delivered through action to protect and enhance their habitats. However, there are a number of species, or groups of species, which can benefit from specific, targeted actions. These have been identified as priority species in Tower Hamlets.

Table 2: priority species Species or group	Scientific name	England priority³²	London priority³³	Lee Valley Priority³⁴	Canary Wharf Priority³⁵	Olympic Legacy Priority³⁶
Bats (all species)	Vespertilionidae	some	X	X	X	X
Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus europaeus</i>	X	X	X		
Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	X	X	X		X
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		X	X	X	X
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>				X	
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>				X	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X	X	X	X	X
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			X	X	X
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		X	X	X	X
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		X	X		X
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>				X	X
Amphibians (all species)	Amphibia	some	some	some		X
European Eel	<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	X	X	X	all fish	X
Brimstone butterfly	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>					
Wild bees (all species of bumblebees and solitary bees)	Apoidea	some	some	some	X	X
Streaked Bombardier Beetle	<i>Brachinus sclopeta</i>	X	X	X		
Black Poplar	<i>Populus nigra</i> ssp <i>betulifolia</i>		X	X		
Jersey Cudweed	<i>Laphangium luteoalbum</i>					

³² [Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England](#) (Secretary of State for Environment, Farming & Rural Affairs 2010)

³³ [London's BAP priority species](#) (London Biodiversity Partnership)

³⁴ [Lee Valley Regional Park Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2029](#) (LVRPA 2019)

³⁵ [Canary Wharf Group Biodiversity Action Plan 2018-2028](#) (Canary Wharf Group 2018)

³⁶ [Legacy Communities Scheme Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2019](#) (London Legacy Development Corporation 2013)

3.2.1 Bats



At least three species of bats are regularly recorded in Tower Hamlets. The Common Pipistrelle is the most frequently recorded species. Soprano and Nathusius's Pipistrelles are also fairly widespread in the borough. There have also been occasional records of several other species, including Noctule and Leisler's Bat, in recent years. Bats require safe places to roost, usually in buildings or old trees, and good foraging habitat with plenty of nocturnal insects. The likelihood of bats roosting in a building increases with the age of the building, the presence of features such as lofts and gable ends, and the proximity to good feeding habitat such as woodland, water and large open spaces. General improvements to, and increase in, habitats such as woods, hedgerows and meadows will benefit bats. Specific interventions for bats generally relate to provision of roosting sites, such as bat boxes, in appropriate places, and including night-flowering plants in landscaping in areas where bats are likely to forage. Outdoor lighting should be designed to minimise impacts on foraging and roosting bats, and lighting of roosts and important foraging habitat such as waterways and treelines should be avoided. Best practice guidance has been published by the Institution of Lighting Professionals.³⁷ All bats and their roosts are strictly protected under the European Union Habitats Directive³⁸. All bats are London priority species, and Soprano Pipistrelle and Noctule are priority species in England.

Objectives for bats

- To ensure potential impacts on bats are considered in the assessment of all planning applications.
- To provide roost sites for bats, such as bat boxes or bat bricks, in new developments, housing estates, parks and schools in parts of the borough where bats are likely to use them. **[Target: 30 sites]**
- To encourage nocturnal insects by planting night-scented plants in landscaping schemes in parts of the borough where bats are likely to forage. **[No specific target]**

³⁷ [Guidance Note 8: Bats and artificial lighting](#) (Institution of Lighting Professionals 2018)

³⁸ [Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora](#)

3.2.2 Hedgehog

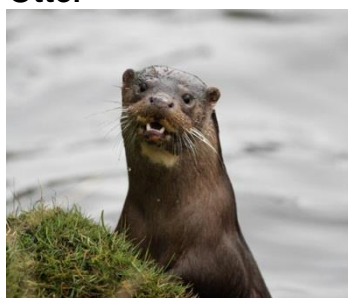


Hedgehogs have declined alarmingly in Tower Hamlets in recent years, part of a national decline. There have been no records since 2013 from their previous stronghold in the south of the Isle of Dogs. The only records since then have been from Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, where a small number of rescue Hedgehogs were released in 2015, and a single individual near Stepney Green. As they are nocturnal and tend to occur in private gardens, surveying for Hedgehogs is difficult, and encouraging residents to report hedgehog sightings remains a priority. As much of their habitat is within private gardens, encouraging hedgehog-friendly gardening is likely to be more effective than direct interventions. This includes increasing connectivity by ensuring Hedgehogs can pass under garden fences, avoiding use of slug pellets, and checking bonfires before lighting them. Specific interventions generally relate to providing secure places to hibernate.

Objectives for Hedgehog

- Continue to seek information on the distribution of Hedgehogs in the borough.
- Encourage Hedgehog-friendly gardening in areas where Hedgehogs are still present by providing information to residents on how to help hedgehogs.
- Install Hedgehog homes in appropriate places in parks, housing estates, schools and community gardens in parts of the borough where Hedgehogs still occur. **[No specific target]**

3.2.3 Otter



Otters are not currently resident in Tower Hamlets, but they occur further up the River Lea and the population is expanding, so they could easily colonise in future. There has been one recent record in Tower Hamlets. Otter conservation is largely a matter of improving river habitats and water quality. In heavily-modified watercourses such as we have in Tower Hamlets, lack of suitable breeding sites could be a limiting factor for Otters, so the provision of artificial holts in suitable waterside locations could assist colonisation. The Otter is strictly protected under the European Union Habitats Directive³⁹.

³⁹ [Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora](#)

Objectives for Otter

- To ensure that the possible presence of Otters is considered in the assessment of planning applications adjacent to watercourses.
- To install artificial holts in appropriate waterside locations, including in new developments. **[Target: 1 site]**

3.2.4 Black Redstart



The Black Redstart is a nationally scarce breeding bird, associated with industrial and brownfield sites. A few pairs nest in Tower Hamlets each year, mostly in the south and east of the borough, but numbers and sites vary from year to year. In some years, up to 10% of the UK population might nest in the borough. Conservation of Black Redstarts is linked to the provision of open mosaic habitats, including on green roofs, for which the species is a flagship in London. Specific interventions involve providing nest sites in suitable places. The Black Redstart is strictly protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981⁴⁰.

Objectives for Black Redstart

- To ensure that the possible presence of Black Redstarts is considered in the assessment of planning applications.
- To provide suitable nest sites for Black Redstarts in areas where open mosaic habitats are created or retained. **[Target: 10 sites]**

3.2.5 Common Tern



Common Terns have nested in Tower Hamlets on rafts provided for them in the docks since the 1990s. The population has declined in recent years due to deterioration and removal of old rafts, and silt accumulation in East India Dock Basin. No successful breeding took place in 2016-18. There is plenty of good feeding habitat along rivers, canals, and in the docks, but as a breeding species in the borough, Common Terns are wholly reliant on the provision of artificial floating nest sites, ideally shingle-covered rafts.

⁴⁰ [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(as amended\)](#)

Objectives for Common Tern

- To ensure that, where new developments reduce the value of an existing breeding site for Common Terns, this is compensated for by the provision of rafts in suitable places nearby.
- To increase the available nesting habitat for Common Terns through the provision of rafts on suitable water bodies. **[Target: 100m² of rafts or 10 rafts]**

3.2.6 House Martin



The House Martin has declined markedly as a breeding bird in Tower Hamlets in recent years, as it has across London and nationally. The main reason for the decline is probably a decrease in flying insects, perhaps coupled with changes on its migration routes or wintering grounds. This is best addressed through general improvements to wildlife habitats of all types. As it nests on buildings, nest sites are not a limiting factor. However, as a communal breeder, House Martins can be encouraged to nest by leaving old nests or installing artificial House Martin nests on walls.

Objectives for House Martin

- To encourage new House Martin colonies by installing artificial nests on suitable buildings. **[Target: 5 sites]**

3.2.7 House Sparrow



The House Sparrow, often regarded as a symbol of London (the “cockney sparrer”), has declined hugely across London in the last 20 or so years, disappearing from large areas. Its current distribution in Tower Hamlets is patchy, but it remains common in some parts of the borough. The reasons for the decline remain unknown despite extensive research, but may include habitat loss, pollution, predation and possibly disease. There is some evidence that the decline has halted, and that sparrows are returning to some places where they had disappeared. Because the reasons for the decline are not understood, it is not clear how best to help sparrow conservation. Nevertheless, general habitat improvements in gardens and parks, which increase the availability of seeds and insects for food, and cover for nesting, might help and will certainly help other birds. Specific interventions for House

Sparrows involve creating suitable nest sites, either through erecting nest boxes or providing dense climbing plants growing up walls.

Objectives for House Sparrow

- To increase the availability of nest sites for House Sparrows by installing sparrow terrace nest boxes or growing dense climbers on walls. **[Target: 30 sites]**

3.2.8 Kingfisher



The Kingfisher is a winter visitor to Tower Hamlets' waterways and docks, but does not currently breed in the borough. A lack of suitable nest sites is probably the main factor preventing Kingfishers from nesting here. Providing artificial nesting banks for Kingfishers in undisturbed waterside locations, including within new waterside developments, would encourage nesting. Nesting banks have recently been constructed beside the Regent's Canal in Limehouse and beside Bow Creek at London City Island. The Kingfisher is strictly protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981⁴¹.

Objectives for Kingfisher

- To increase the availability of nest sites for Kingfishers by providing artificial nesting banks in appropriate waterside locations. **[Target: 1 site]**

3.2.9 Peregrine



The Peregrine, the fastest animal in the world, has successfully colonised London over the last 15 years, nesting on tall buildings. Up to three pairs nest in Tower Hamlets, which is probably the maximum number of territories the area will support. Breeding success has not always been good, due to disturbance or poor nest sites. The provision of nest boxes in undisturbed parts of roofs on existing or new tall buildings could significantly increase the success of Peregrines in the borough. Several such boxes have recently been installed. The Peregrine is strictly protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981⁴².

⁴¹ [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(as amended\)](#)

⁴² [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(as amended\)](#)

Objectives for Peregrine

- To increase the availability of nest sites for Peregrines by providing nest boxes on tall buildings. **[Target: 2 sites]**

3.2.10 Sand Martin



A few pairs of Sand Martins nest in drainage holes in the walls of canals and docks across the borough. Sand Martins respond well to the provision of artificial nesting banks in suitable places, especially near water. The provision of artificial banks could significantly increase the population of Sand Martins in the borough.

Objectives for Sand Martin

- To increase the availability of nest sites for Sand Martins by providing artificial nesting banks in suitable locations. **[Target: 1 site]**

3.2.11 Swift



Swifts have declined across Britain in recent years, and one of the reasons is probably a lack of suitable nest sites in modern buildings. Nest boxes for Swifts can easily be installed on buildings, or incorporated into the design of new buildings. Being colonial nesters, Swifts can be encouraged to use nest boxes by playing recordings of their calls from the buildings where the boxes are sited.

Objectives for Swift

- To increase the availability of nest sites for Swifts by providing nest boxes on suitable buildings, including in new developments. **[Target: 20 sites]**

3.2.12 Amphibians



Four species of native amphibians occur in Tower Hamlets. The Common Frog and Smooth Newt are fairly common and widespread, the Common Toad occurs in a few places, and there is one population of Great Crested Newts resulting from a deliberate introduction in the Spitalfields area. Amphibians breed in ponds, but spend much of the rest of their lives on land. Conserving our existing ponds and creating new ones will help amphibians, but it is crucial that ponds are surrounded by suitable terrestrial habitat which provides cover and food. The Great Crested Newt is strictly protected under the European Union Habitats Directive⁴³ and is a priority species in England and London. The Common Toad is a priority species in England.

Objectives for amphibians

- To ensure that existing and new ponds are connected with suitable terrestrial habitat for amphibians. **[No specific target]**

3.2.13 European Eel



The Eel has declined hugely in Britain in recent years. It has a complex life history, breeding in the sea and spending most of its life in freshwater. One of the likely reasons for its decline is an increase in structures which block migration along waterways. Actions which enhance habitat and water quality in our rivers and canals will benefit Eels. Specific action is required to maintain and improve the ability of Eels to migrate. Old Ford Lock is the most significant known barrier in Tower Hamlets which would benefit from an Eel pass. The entrances to marinas such as Limehouse Basin and St Katharine's Docks may also be barriers.

Objectives for Eel

- To ensure Eel migration is considered when assessing any new structures in watercourses.
- To assist Eel migration by installing Eel passes to existing barriers to migration. **[Target: 1 site]**

⁴³ [Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora](#)

3.2.14 Brimstone butterfly



The Brimstone is a fairly common and widespread butterfly in Tower Hamlets, but its caterpillar food plants, Common Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn, are quite rare, except in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, where both buckthorns have been extensively planted, and where the butterfly consequently has a high population. Common (or Purging) Buckthorn is a sizeable shrub which likes fairly dry conditions, while Alder Buckthorn is a smaller shrub which likes damp soils. As adult Brimstones range over a wide area, they are quick to take advantage of buckthorns wherever they are planted. Common Buckthorn is a good plant for a mixed hedge. Brimstone early stages are on it between April and July. The shrub can be trimmed at any other time. Sea Buckthorn, sometimes used in landscaping, is not a Brimstone caterpillar food plant.

Objectives for Brimstone

- To increase the resource of food plants for caterpillars of the Brimstone butterfly by planting Common Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn in suitable places, including parks, schools, housing estates and community gardens. **[Target: 15 sites]**

3.2.15 Wild bees (bumblebees and solitary bees)



Wild bees are in serious decline throughout Britain, and indeed all over the world, due largely to habitat loss and pesticides. Bees are vitally important as pollinators of food crops. Wild bees have been chosen as priority species in Tower Hamlets as a proxy for all pollinating insects, which include domestic Honey Bees, flies, butterflies and beetles. Action for wild bees will benefit other pollinators, too. Many common species of bumblebees and solitary bees will take nectar from a wide range of flowers wherever they can find it. The best way to help them is to plant more nectar-rich flowers in parks, gardens and the built environment. Tower Hamlets also supports important populations of several less common bees, including the Brown-banded Carder Bee (*Bombus humilis*), Black Mining Bee (*Andrena pilipes*), Red-girdled Mining Bee (*Andrena labiata*) and Clover Blunt-horn Bee (*Melitta leporina*). Some of these scarcer species have more specific requirements, such as particular species of flowers. Other solitary bees, such as the Fork-tailed Flower Bee (*Anthophora furcata*) and yellow-faced bees (*Hylaeus* species), make their nests in decaying wood, and will benefit from the provision of log piles and standing dead

wood. More information about wild bees in Tower Hamlets can be found on the Tower Habitats website⁴⁴. The Brown-banded Carder Bee is a priority species for England and London.

Objectives for wild bees

- To increase the food resource for bumblebees and other pollinators by planting nectar-rich flowers in parks, gardens (including community gardens) and the built environment, including growing ivy on suitable structures in sunny places. **[Target: 100 sites]**
- To increase nesting sites for bumblebees by installing bee boxes or insect hotels in suitable places. **[Target: 20 sites]**
- To increase the available habitat for solitary bees and other deadwood invertebrates by creating loggeries in parks, housing estates and community gardens. **[Target: 20 sites]**

3.2.16 Streaked Bombardier Beetle



The Streaked Bombardier Beetle is extremely rare in Britain. It has been found on only a handful of sites in recent years, all of them in East London, and is thought to survive on only one of these. It was found in Mile End Park in 2010, but appears to have been lost because the site became too overgrown. This site has recently been restored. The beetle is associated with brownfield sites, favouring sparse vegetation with plenty of bare, stony ground. It will benefit from actions which increase open mosaic habitats. Specific targeted actions are to ensure that its potential presence is considered when sites with suitable habitat are the subject of planning applications, and to create areas of bare ground with stones and rocks as part of open mosaic habitats.

Objectives for Streaked Bombardier Beetle

- To ensure that the redevelopment of sites which contain suitable habitat for the Streaked Bombardier Beetle takes account of the possible presence of this rare species.

⁴⁴ Bees in Tower Hamlets <https://www.towerhabitats.org/wild-things-places/bees-in-tower-hamlets/>

3.2.17 Black Poplar



The Black Poplar is Britain's rarest native timber tree. It has an historical association with Tower Hamlets, as it is the origin of the place name Poplar. There are now very few mature Black Poplars remaining in the borough. These are all of a similar age, and several of them in Meath Gardens and Victoria Park have died in the last few years. For a number of reasons, Black Poplars no longer reproduce naturally in Britain, and the conservation of the species therefore depends on planting. The vast majority of Black Poplars in Britain belong to a fairly small number of genetically identical clones, each clone having originated as cuttings from a single tree. Planting the rarer clones to preserve genetic diversity is particularly important. The Black Poplar is a large tree which is best planted well away from buildings.

Objectives for Black Poplar

- To protect and manage our existing Black Poplars to maximise their lifespan.
- To plant Black Poplars, especially those belonging to rare clones, in suitable places in parks and housing amenity land. **[Target: 25 trees]**

3.2.18 Jersey Cudweed



Jersey Cudweed is a rare plant in Britain and is protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981⁴⁵. It grows in dry, open places. It has been found in recent years on bare ground and in paving cracks in several places in the borough, including Poplar Dock Marina, Millwall Inner Dock, Silvocea Way, Ben Johnson Lock and St Katharine's Dock. Although these populations are highly unlikely to be of native origin, the protection still applies.

Objectives for Jersey Cudweed

- To ensure the known populations of Jersey Cudweed in the borough are protected or, where this is not possible, their loss is appropriately mitigated.
- To ensure that development sites with suitable habitat are surveyed for Jersey Cudweed so that it can be properly considered in assessing planning applications.

⁴⁵ [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(as amended\)](#)

4 The action plans

Built Environment Action Plan

Introduction

Tower Hamlets is a densely built-up borough, and over one third of its area is occupied by buildings, streets and car parks. The built environment can be surprisingly rich in wildlife. Buildings provide roosts for bats, and nest sites for birds which more traditionally nest on cliffs. These include the spectacular Peregrine Falcon and the rare Black Redstart. There is also an increasing population of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, the former a species of conservation concern in England as it is in serious decline in its traditional coastal haunts.

We can enhance the built environment for wildlife in many ways. Green roofs are the easiest place to replace our disappearing brownfield (open mosaic) habitats. Buildings can be enhanced for bats and birds by providing custom-designed nesting and roosting sites, either built into the fabric of new buildings or retrofitted to existing ones. Climbers and other forms of green walls can provide nectar for bees and nesting sites for our declining House Sparrows. And streets can be greened with trees, hedges and planters full of nectar-rich flowers.



Biodiverse green roof on the Soanes Centre, Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

Priority habitats

Open mosaic habitats

Priority species

Bats

Black Redstart

House Martin

House Sparrow

Peregrine

Swift

Brimstone butterfly

Wild bees

Streaked Bombardier Beetle

Jersey Cudweed

How we will achieve the objectives and targets for these habitats and species

Tower Hamlets Council will:

Ensure that potential harm to these species and habitats, particularly the Streaked Bombardier Beetle and Jersey Cudweed, which might otherwise be overlooked, is given due consideration in the assessment of planning applications;

Require biodiversity enhancements which contribute to these objectives and targets in new developments through the planning process;

Ensure that the Council's own housing developments include biodiversity enhancements which contribute to these objectives and targets, and serve as examples of good practice to other developers;

Work with Tower Hamlets Homes and social housing providers to identify suitable buildings for retrofitting biodiverse green roofs and identify funding sources to implement these;

Create sustainable urban drainage schemes in streets and include planting which contributes to these targets;

Ensure that Green Grid projects in the built environment contribute to these targets wherever possible.

Tower Hamlets Homes and other social housing providers can:

Include biodiverse green roofs which meet the definition of open mosaic habitats in all new build and estate regeneration schemes;

Retrofit biodiverse green roofs which meet the definition of open mosaic habitats on existing buildings;

Grow ivy and other nectar-rich climbers up suitable walls;

Install planters with nectar-rich flowers and/or plant nectar-rich flowers in existing neglected planters;

Install bat boxes, bumblebee boxes and nest boxes for Peregrines, Swifts, House Sparrows, House Martins and other birds in appropriate places on buildings;

Avoid removing old House Martin nests from buildings.

Canary Wharf Group will (subject to construction programmes staying on track):

Install 13 Black Redstart nest boxes, 13 House Sparrow boxes, 10 Swift boxes and 2 bat boxes within developments at Wood Wharf and 1 Bank Street;

Install eight new biodiverse roofs.

Developers will be required to provide biodiversity enhancements which could include:

Installing biodiverse green roofs which meet the definition of open mosaic habitats on all new development;

Installing living walls with nectar-rich climbers in new development;

Providing planters with nectar-rich flowers in new development;

Incorporating roost sites for bats and nest sites for Swifts within the design of new buildings;

Installing nest boxes for Peregrines, House Sparrows, House Martins and Black Redstarts in appropriate places on new buildings.

Residents can:

Grow nectar-rich flowers in window boxes;

Avoid removing old House Martin nests from buildings;

Install bat boxes, bumblebee boxes and nest boxes for House Sparrows and other birds in appropriate places on buildings;

Grow nectar-rich climbers such as ivy, honeysuckle and jasmine up walls.

How we will raise awareness of biodiversity in the built environment

The Tower Habitats biodiversity partnership will:

Provide news and information on design for biodiversity on the Tower Habitats website;

Organise visits to examples of best practice for planners, developers and other professionals.

Gardens & Grounds Action Plan

Introduction

Almost 40% of the area of Tower Hamlets is occupied by gardens and the landscaped areas around housing estates, schools, businesses and other premises. By far the majority of this is housing amenity land. In the last few years, social housing providers and residents in Tower Hamlets have created some excellent wildlife habitats, such as meadows, copses, hedges, orchards and nectar-rich community and communal gardens, around housing estates. The Mayor has pledged to increase the number of planting projects on estates.

Many schools have also created wildlife gardens, which are wonderful educational resources. Private gardens, too, can be havens for wildlife, supporting a wealth of birds and insects, as well as amphibians if there is a pond nearby. Private gardens may also be the last refuge for our disappearing population of Hedgehogs.

Landscaping around industrial premises may not need to look too “tidy” all the time, and often doesn’t have a recreational function. This offers an opportunity to retain or create at ground level the open mosaic habitats which are disappearing as brownfield sites are developed, and are increasingly being restricted to green roofs.



Winterton House Organic Garden has lots of nectar-rich flowers for bees

Priority habitats

Flower-rich grassland
Open mosaic habitats
Native broadleaved woodland
Orchards
Mixed native hedgerows
Ponds

Priority species

Bats
Hedgehog
House Sparrow
Amphibians
Brimstone butterfly
Wild bees
Black Poplar

How we will achieve the objectives and targets for these habitats and species

Tower Hamlets Council will:

Seek biodiversity enhancements which contribute to these targets in the landscaping of all new developments;

Provide free wildflower seeds to residents, schools and community groups;

Ensure that community gardens created or enhanced through its Community Volunteering scheme include features which contribute to the objectives and targets in the LBAP;

Support existing community gardens to make improvements to encourage biodiversity, including providing technical advice and assisting in finding funding;

Work with Tower Hamlets Homes and social housing providers to advise on managing their land for biodiversity, identify enhancement projects and help to find funding sources to implement these.

Schools can:

Create meadows, orchards, ponds and hedges within their grounds;

Install bat boxes and nest boxes for birds and bumblebees;

Plant common or alder buckthorns and other food plants for butterfly caterpillars;

Plant native trees, preferably of at least three species;

Plant nectar-rich flowers to provide food for wild bees and other insects;

Create loggeries and insect hotels.

The Tower Hill Trust will:

Provide grants to schools and community groups for enhancements to school grounds and community gardens which contribute towards the objectives and targets in the LBAP over the next five years; grants will continue to be awarded on a case by case basis.

Tower Hamlets Homes and other social housing providers (and groups of residents managing community gardens) can:

Note: all of these can be included within estate regeneration schemes, but most of them can also be done in existing amenity space and community and communal gardens.

Record, protect and appropriately manage the priority habitats and features of value to priority species which already exist on their estates;

Create wildlife habitats such as meadows, small areas of woodland, orchards, and hedges within the landscaping around estates, and enhance any existing habitats;

Install bat boxes, nest boxes for birds, bee boxes and hedgehog homes in suitable places on estates;

Create loggeries and insect hotels;

Plant common or alder buckthorns and other food plants for butterfly caterpillars;

Plant native trees, preferably at least three species on a site;

Plant nectar-rich flowers to provide food for wild bees and other insects;

Plant Black Poplars in suitable sites away from buildings and paths.

Developers will be required to provide biodiversity enhancements which could include:

Creating wildlife habitats such as meadows, small areas of woodland, orchards and mixed native hedges within the landscaping around developments;

Creating open mosaic habitat within the landscaping around industrial developments;

Installing bat boxes, nest boxes for birds, bumblebee boxes and hedgehog homes in suitable places within the landscaping around developments;

Ensuring that lighting of new development (during construction and operation) does not adversely impact on foraging bats;

Creating loggeries and insect hotels within the landscaping around developments;

Planting common or alder buckthorns and other food plants for butterfly caterpillars within the landscaping around developments;

Planting native trees, preferably at least three species on a site;

Planting nectar-rich flowers to provide food for wild bees and other insects, within the landscaping around developments.

Residents can:

Create wildlife ponds and small meadows in their gardens;

Plant mixed native hedges including common or alder buckthorns;

Plant flowering shrubs, annuals and perennials in gardens to provide a year-round nectar source for bees and other insects;

Install bird and bat boxes, hedgehog homes, bee boxes, insect hotels, loggeries and other habitat features in gardens;

Ensure garden fences have gaps or holes which allow hedgehogs to pass between gardens.

How we will raise awareness of biodiversity in gardens

The Tower Habitats biodiversity partnership will:

Provide news and information on wildlife gardening and landscaping for wildlife on the Tower Habitats website.

Tower Hamlets Council will:

Seek to facilitate the creation of training programmes which will provide opportunities for people, including residents, staff of local landlords and others, to better understand how gardens and grounds can be developed and managed to promote biodiversity.

Tower Hamlets Homes and other social housing providers can:

Encourage residents to get involved in improving their estates for wildlife with events such as community planting days;

Provide information about local wildlife and events in newsletters and on noticeboards.

Tower Hamlets Food Growing Network will (subject to funding being available):

Organise training on improving biodiversity in community gardens for local food growers and garden managers.

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will (subject to funding being available):

Support the interest of social housing providers to help them realise their wildlife and biodiversity aspirations on estates;

Take initiatives to enable residents and community groups to raise biodiversity awareness and support practical biodiversity initiatives in their local areas.

Rivers & Standing Water Action Plan

Introduction

Almost 15% of Tower Hamlets is covered by water, almost certainly the highest proportion of any London borough. This is a result of a very long Thames frontage around the south of the borough, and the large open water spaces of the docks. There is also a section of the tidal Lea, over 8 kilometres of canal and numerous small water bodies. The rivers and canals have rather little marginal vegetation, and suffer at times from poor water quality and invasive non-native species. They nevertheless support fish, aquatic birds and invertebrates, with a few scarce plants in the canals. The docks have limited habitats, but can hold large numbers of waterfowl in hard weather when most fresh waters are frozen. The ponds are important for amphibians, including a small introduced population of the protected Great Crested Newt in Spitalfields.

Water quality can be enhanced through getting rid of sewer misconnections, and through sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) reducing surface water runoff into rivers. The priorities for biodiversity action are to diversify the habitats in the waterways and docks, control invasive species, and increase the number of ponds.



East India Dock Basin Nature Reserve is one of the best wetlands in the borough

Priority habitats

Rivers
Standing open water (Canals & docks)
Ponds
Reed beds

Priority species

Bats
Otter
Common Tern
Kingfisher
Sand Martin
Amphibians
European Eel

How we will achieve the objectives and targets for these habitats and species

Tower Hamlets Council will:

Seek enhancements to canals, rivers and docks which contribute to these targets through new development on adjacent sites;

Work with the Canal & River Trust and other stakeholders to seek funding for enhancements to waterways and docks which contribute to these targets;

Create new ponds in parks where appropriate;

Schools can:

Create wildlife ponds in their school grounds.

Thames21 will:

Manage existing reed beds in the Lea Navigation to maintain and enhance their biodiversity value;

Seek funding for and create new reed beds in the Lea Navigation and Limehouse Cut.

The Canal & River Trust will:

Control and seek to eradicate invasive plant species in canals;

Enhance canals and docks by installing vegetated rafts and/or gabion baskets;

Identify suitable locations in the Regent's Canal and Lea Navigation for habitat creation and enhancement, and seek funding to facilitate these.

The Lower Regents Coalition will:

Continue to create and enhance habitats in and around the Regent's Canal.

Lee Valley Park will:

Seek to enhance habitats at East India Dock Basin, including de-silting of the basin to provide increased open water, and replacing or refurbishing the tern rafts when desilting allows safe boat access to the basin.

Canary Wharf Group will (subject to construction programmes staying on track):

Install 90 square metres of tern rafts in the West India and/or Millwall Docks;

Install a wall designed to provide habitat for fish in the dock beside the 1 Bank Street development.

Developers can:

Create ponds with wildlife value (as opposed to purely ornamental water features) within landscape schemes for housing or commercial developments;

Fit vegetated gabion baskets to walls of rivers, canals or docks within or adjacent to their development sites;

Install vegetated rafts in docks within or adjacent to their development sites;

Install tern rafts in docks within or adjacent to their development sites;

Create nest sites for Kingfishers and Sand Martins, and artificial Otter holts, in appropriate places in waterside developments;

Eradicate invasive plants from water bodies within or adjacent to their development sites.

How we will raise awareness of biodiversity in rivers and docks

The Tower Habitats biodiversity partnership will:

Provide news and information on wildlife and events along waterways on the Tower Habitats website.

Thames21 will:

Run training courses for people wishing to help look after and enhance their local waterways.

The Lower Regents Coalition will:

Continue to promote the importance of canals through their regular volunteer litter clean-ups on and around the Regent's Canal and Limehouse Cut.

Parks, Squares & Burial Grounds Action Plan

Introduction

About 13% of the borough is made up of parks and other public open space. These include sizeable areas of high quality wildlife habitats in Mudchute, Tower Hamlets Cemetery and Mile End Parks, all of which are Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation. Many other parks also contain valuable habitats, but there is plenty of scope for further habitat creation and enhancement.

There are plenty of parks where new meadows, orchards and hedges can be created, as well as increasing the amount of nectar-rich flowers and native trees. Suitable locations for new woodland, open mosaic habitats and ponds are more limited, but opportunities may be found to create these habitats. Parks also represent the best opportunity to increase the borough's population of Black Poplars.



A guided walk in Mile End Park

Priority habitats

Flower-rich grassland
Open mosaic habitats
Native broadleaved woodland
Orchards
Mixed native hedgerows
Ponds

Priority species

Bats
Hedgehog
House Sparrow
Amphibians
Black Poplar
Brimstone butterfly
Wild bees
Streaked Bombardier Beetle

How we will achieve the objectives and targets for these habitats and species

Tower Hamlets Council will:

Manage existing wildlife habitats in parks to maintain and, where appropriate, enhance their biodiversity value;

Identify appropriate locations to create and enhance priority habitats in its parks;

Seek funding from a variety of sources to implement the enhancements identified;

Collaborate on fund-raising with third sector groups managing public open spaces;

Ensure biodiversity is considered in all capital schemes in parks, and biodiversity enhancements which contribute to these targets are included where possible;

Continue to monitor spiders and beetles in Mile End Park to assess the effectiveness of habitat management;

Ensure through the development management process that parks in new developments include wildlife habitats which contribute to these targets.

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will:

Manage existing wildlife habitats in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park to maintain and, where appropriate, enhance their biodiversity value;

Monitor wild bee populations in Cemetery Park and substantially increase populations of nectar-rich flowers for bees, in woodland and meadow habitats;

Continue to monitor spiders, beetles and butterflies in Cemetery Park, and extend the monitoring to other groups of plants and animals (e.g. hoverflies) if capacity allows.

The Mudchute Association will:

Manage existing wildlife habitats at Mudchute to maintain and, where appropriate, enhance their biodiversity value;

Seek opportunities to restore flower-rich grassland, including calcareous grassland, at Mudchute where this habitat has been invaded in recent years by coarse vegetation, bramble and scrub.

The Friends of Meath Gardens will:

Continue to create and enhance wildlife habitats in Meath Gardens.

Residents can:

Volunteer for conservation work at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Mudchute, Victoria Park or Mile End Park.

How we will raise awareness of biodiversity in parks

The Tower Habitats biodiversity partnership will:

Provide news and information on wildlife and events in parks on the Tower Habitats website.

Tower Hamlets Council will:

Run a programme of wildlife-related events in parks;

Seek to facilitate the creation of training programmes which will enable parks staff, and others, to learn new skills relevant to managing and developing for biodiversity in public open spaces.

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park will:

Run a programme of wildlife-related events at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park;

Take a proactive role in the provision of biodiversity training;

Continue to support the schools environmental education programmes in the Soanes Centre and develop other initiatives such as Forest Schools.

The Mudchute Association will:

Run wildlife-related events at Mudchute;

Maintain regular features on Mudchute's wildlife on the website and blog;

Work with schools to provide opportunities for environmental education at Mudchute.

Residents can:

Monitor wildlife in their local park and report sightings to the Biodiversity Officer.

References

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- [Creating green roofs for invertebrates: a best practice guide](#) (Buglife)
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- [Tower Hamlets Local Plan 2031 latest version](#) (LB Tower Hamlets 2018)
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