

Review of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in Tower Hamlets 2016

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 (<https://www.london.gov.uk/WHAT-WE-DO/environment/parks-green-spaces-and-biodiversity/biodiversity#Stub-234936>).

SINCs in Tower Hamlets were most recently reviewed in 2011. 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 2016 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 25 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 between mid-July and early September 2011. 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 were drawn up by the Biodiversity Officer and 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, and revised in the light of that discussion and other comments received. The group of people considering the draft proposals included the following:

Harriet Peacock (LBTH Planning, EIA Officer)
Ellie Kuper Thomas (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)
Lydia Davies (Trees for Cities Projects Director)
Ben Fenton (Thames21, Love the Lea project)
John Swindells (local resident and expert botanist)
Bob Watts (biodiversity lead, Gateway Housing Association)
Nick Martin (Sustainability Manager, Poplar Harca)
Paul Wilson (Community Engagement Manager, EastendHomes)

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
<i>THBI08</i>	<i>Blackwall Basin</i>	<i>boundary change and downgrade to BII – now THBII14</i>
THBI09	Spitalfields City Farm & Allen Gardens	upgraded from BII – see THBII06
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
<i>THBII06</i>	<i>Spitalfields City Farm & Allen Gardens</i>	<i>upgraded to BI – now THBI09</i>
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	expanded – see THL14
THBII14	Blackwall Basin	downgraded from BI – see THBI08
THBII15	Millwall Park	upgraded from Local – see THL22
THBII16	Poplar Dock Marina	boundary change and upgraded from Local – see THL30
THBII17	Saffron Avenue Pond	upgraded from Local – see THL31
THL01	St George in the East Church Gardens	no change
THL03	Old Railway at Fairfoot Road	no change
THL04	Ion Square Gardens	no change
THL08	Swedenborg Gardens	no change
THL12	Perring Community Garden	no change
THL13	Disused railway Bow	no change
<i>THL14</i>	<i>Hermitage Basin</i>	<i>upgrade to BII, add to THBII13</i>
THL15	St Katharine's Dock	no change
THL17	St Anne's Churchyard, Limehouse	no change
<i>THL22</i>	<i>Millwall Park</i>	<i>upgrade to BII – now THBII15</i>
THL23	Cyril Jackson School Nature Area	no change
THL26	Robin Hood Gardens	no change
THL27	Meath Gardens	no change
<i>THL30</i>	<i>Poplar Dock</i>	<i>boundary change and upgrade to BII – now THBII16</i>
<i>THL31</i>	<i>Saffron Avenue Pond</i>	<i>upgrade to BII – now THBII17</i>
THL32	King Edward Memorial Park	no change
THL33	Elf Green	new SINC

Recommendations site by site

Brief reasons are given for all proposed changes.

THBI08 Blackwall Basin

The wasteland area to the north of the basin has been cleared as part of the Wood Wharf development and should be deleted (see Map 1 below). The main reason for Borough Grade 1 status for Blackwall Basin has been breeding Common Terns and occasional large numbers of diving ducks in hard weather. While terns still attempt to nest in most years, they have not done so successfully for at least 2 years. There is currently only one usable raft, and more rafts are soon to be installed in other docks. There have not been large numbers of waterfowl for many years – in the last cold winter, Millwall Outer Dock was the favoured site for displaced diving ducks. With permission granted for increased moorings as part of the Wood Wharf development, it seems highly unlikely that Blackwall Basin will ever again be significantly better for nature conservation than the other docks in the area.

Revise boundary and downgrade to Borough Grade 2. Becomes THBI14

Map 1- THBI14 Blackwall Basin (proposed deletion outlined in red)



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THBI01 Millwall & West India Docks

Several areas of open water in the West India Docks have been lost to developments, including Wood Wharf, Heron Quays West, Park Place and Crossrail. The latter loss had already occurred before the 2011 review, but was missed in that review. These areas should be deleted (see Map 2 below)

Revise boundary

Map 2- THBII01 West India Docks (proposed deletions outlined in red)



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THBII06 Spitalfields City Farm & Allen Gardens

This site supports a well-established population of Crested Newt, a European protected species. The population is not natural, but stems from an introduction to a garden pond. The date of the introduction is not known, but the population has been extant for well over ten years and appears to be naturalised. Crested Newts breed in at least one of the ponds in Spitalfields City Farm. This is the only site in the borough for a European protected species, and consequently warrants Borough Grade 1 status.

Upgrade to Borough Grade 1. Becomes THBII09

THL14 Hermitage Basin

Hermitage Basin supports several species of dragonflies and damselflies, including a large population of the Small Red-eyed Damselfly, a nationally scarce (though increasing) species. These populations are shared with the adjacent Wapping Canal, and it is likely that the basin and canal are treated as one site by damselflies. The basin also supports fish and small numbers of water birds. It is effectively a part of the same chain of wetlands as Shadwell Basin and the Wapping Canal (though the three water bodies are not hydrologically connected), and is sensibly treated as part of the same SINC.

Upgrade to Borough Grade 2 as part of THBII13

THL22 Millwall Park

This site has seen significant habitat creation and enhancement since the 2011 review. The meadow on the western mound, in particular, is now very well-established and supports large populations of grasshoppers and butterflies. The proximity to the more extensive habitat of Mudchute increase its value, as the two are effectively an ecological unit. The park is clearly of higher nature conservation value than other parks identified as Local Sites.

Upgrade to Borough Grade 2. Becomes THBII15

THL30 Poplar Dock Marina

A diverse ruderal flora, including an extremely large population of the protected Jersey Cudweed, and other species scarce in London including Rue-leaved Saxifrage, Slender Sandwort and Musk Stork's-bill, occurs on bare ground along the north and east sides of the dock. Native woodland planting between the dock and Trafalgar Way is starting to mature, and supports breeding and migrant birds. Both of these additional habitats warrant inclusion in the SINC (see Map 3 below). Since the 2011 review, when site was downgraded from Borough Grade 1, it has been found that, despite the almost total coverage of boats, waterfowl still manage to nest in the dock, including Great Crested Grebe and Tufted Duck, neither of which is common as a breeding species in the borough. The site is clearly of more than Local importance, and should be upgraded to Borough Grade 2.

Revise boundary and upgrade to Borough Grade 2. Becomes THBII16.

Map 3 – THBII16 Poplar Dock Marina (proposed additions outlined in red)



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THL31 Saffron Avenue Pond

This is almost certainly the best site in the borough for dragonflies and damselflies (Odonata), with at least nine species breeding, and three others recorded in recent years. This includes a large population of Small Red-eyed damselfly. The pond also supports a large population of Rudd, a scarce native fish (though these are probably not of local genetic origin, as they include a few golden individuals). As the best dragonfly site in the borough, it is clearly of Borough importance.

Upgrade to Borough Grade 2. Becomes THBII17.

New Local Site Elf Green

This former area of amenity grassland on the Glamis Estate has been transformed into wildflower meadows. A scraped area is now well-established as a perennial meadow, while the adjacent mound, which is more fertile, is managed as an annual meadow. A mixed native hedge along the southern edge of the site provides an additional habitat, as does a small copse with bulbs below in the south-west corner. Across the path to the north, a mixed herbaceous and shrub bed contains species chosen to provide nectar for bees and other pollinators for as much of the year as possible. The whole site is managed primarily for nature conservation by EastendHomes, and is a fine example of habitat creation on housing land. Though small, it meets the criteria for a Site of Local Importance.

Add as a new Site of Local Importance. Becomes THL33

Map 4 – THL33 Elf Green (new SINC)



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Appendix 1: paper presented to Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group meeting 13 September 2016

SINC Review 2016

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: the habitats are essentially the same as previously, though it is perhaps a little less "wild". The sides are scrub – a reasonable diversity of mostly native species. The top is grassland, which was short at the time of survey but appeared to have been recently cut rather than under amenity grassland management, with a fair diversity of wild flowers and some bare areas. 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

THBI08 Blackwall Basin: regular bird records. Terns still nest most years and new rafts to come. Wasteland on north edge has been lost to Wood Wharf development. **REVISE BOUNDARY TO REMOVE WASTELAND, CONSIDER DOWNGRADE TO BOROUGH 2**

Sites of Borough Importance, Grade 2

THBII01 Millwall & West India Docks: regular bird records. Grassland area surveyed and still has high coverage of forbs and sizeable population of Restharrow. Several losses of parts of West India Docks. **REVISE BOUNDARY**

THBII03 Bethnal Green Nature Reserve: visited frequently, well-managed with major 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: visited at least annually, well-managed with some recent enhancements. NO CHANGE

THBII06 Spitalfields City Farm & Allen Gardens: farm visited at least annually, well-managed with some recent enhancements. Great Crested Newts present. **CONSIDER UPGRADE TO BOROUGH 1**

THBII07 London Wall and the wall of the Tower of London: 1 plant of London Rocket on north wall of Tower and none on London Wall in August 2016, but may be just too

late in the season. Is it right to designate a SINC for a neophyte? **CONSIDER DELETING SINC?**

THBII11 Pinchin Street Disused Railway: accessed in 2014, being managed. NO CHANGE

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

THBII13 Shadwell Basin, Wapping Wood & Wapping Canals: visited frequently, well-managed with recent enhancements to canal. NO CHANGE

Sites of Local Importance

THL01 St George in the East Church Gardens: meadows have declined a bit, but still good enough. NO CHANGE

THL03 Old Railway at Fairfoot Road: sycamore still dominates the woodland. Japanese knotweed is now covering almost the whole of the top of the bank for most of the length of the site, having spread considerably since 2011. The grassland at the north-eastern end has a "Wildflower Meadow" sign, but is short-mown and contains very few forbs. There is very little evidence of use of the woodland by people. The extent of knotweed makes it hard to justify continuing SINC status for this site, though it could be restored. **DELETE AS A SINC UNLESS RESTORATION IS GOING TO BE STARTED SOON**

THL04 Ion Square Gardens: meadows well-established, annuals all gone but plenty of wild flowers. NO CHANGE

THL08 Swedenborg Gardens: Meadow looking good. Woodland needs some management. Sandy grassland looks the same as when rare legumes were found a couple of years ago (survey too late to find these), and lots of *Trifolium arvense*. Orchard planted and undersown with cornfield annuals – add this to site description. NO CHANGE

THL12 Cameron (Perring) Community Garden: a really interesting, long-established, fairly large community garden with old fruit trees, lots of good nectar-rich planting, plenty of native species and some good features for invertebrates. NO CHANGE

THL13 Disused railway Bow: no access gained so surveyed from roadside. Little change since 2011. 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 2011. NO CHANGE?

THL14 Hermitage Basin: good for Odonata, 50+ Small Red-eyed Damselflies this year. **UPGRADE TO BOROUGH 2 (ADD TO BII13?)**

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. NO CHANGE

THL22 Millwall Park: significant enhancements. **CONSIDER UPGRADE TO BOROUGH 2**

THL23 Cyril Jackson School Nature Area: will need a survey visit when school term starts, but the school website makes a feature of the nature garden, so it is likely to be still there and still in good condition, so no change is anticipated. *[Post-meeting update: attempts to arrange a site visit failed. Assume no change]*

THL26 Robin Hood Gardens: the habitats are little changed since 2011, though most of the wild flowers from the sown meadow, a few of which were still there in 2011, have gone, with only a little chicory remaining. Soon to be enhanced in the estate regeneration. NO CHANGE

THL27 Meath Gardens: 2 Black Poplars still there, more planted. Meadows have gone since last review but are being reinstated. NO CHANGE

THL30 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. **EXTEND SITE BOUNDARY. CONSIDER UPGRADE TO BOROUGH 2?**

THL31 Saffron Avenue Pond: frequently visited. Probably the best site for dragonflies and damselflies in the borough. **CONSIDER UPGRADE TO BOROUGH 2**

THL32 King Edward Memorial Park: Visited earlier this year. Habitats largely unchanged. Large colony of Daisy Earthstar present. NO CHANGE

Additional sites considered

Disused railway at Four Seasons Green: a short section of disused railway at a lower level than the adjacent park. Sycamore woodland in the north-west, the rest roughland dominated by buddleia, nettle and bindweed. Not very diverse, plants all common and mostly non-native. NOT A SINC

Winterton House Organic Garden: a very attractive communal garden with lots of nectar-rich flowers and a small pond. Wildlife is a factor in the management, but not the main focus. At 0.08 hectares would be the joint-smallest SINC. PROBABLY NOT A SINC

Greening Brownfield Community Garden: community food-growing site with some small wild areas, including a small pond which is full of invasive species. Wildlife is a consideration in management, but it is primarily for food-growing. At 0.05 hectares would be the smallest SINC. NOT A SINC

Swedenborg Square Orchard: already part of Swedenborg Gardens SINC.

Elf Green: meadow and annual meadow now well-established, also beds of nectar-rich flowers. Managed primarily for wildlife. At 0.07 hectares would be the smallest SINC. **THE BEST CANDIDATE OF ALL THE SUGGESTED NEW SITES, MAYBE A BIT SMALL?**

Appendix 2: abridged minutes of Tower Hamlets Biodiversity Partnership Steering Group meeting 13 September 2016

**Tower Habitats Steering Group
Tuesday 13 September 2016, 10.30am-12.30pm
EastendHomes, 3 Resolution Plaza E1 6PS**

Minutes

1. **Present:** John Archer (LBTH Biodiversity Officer, Chair), John Swindells (Resident, Vice Chair), Allan Cousens (Resident), Harriet Peacock (LBTH Environmental Impact Assessment Officer), Terry Lyle (FoTHCP), Paul Wilson (EastendHomes), Abi Micallef (East London Business Alliance), Bob Watts (Gateway Housing Association), Kate Halahan (Trees for Cities). In the absence of a Secretary, John Swindells chaired the meeting so John Archer could take minutes.
2. **Apologies:** Nick Martin (Poplar HARCA), Ben Fenton (Thames21), Matus Holecko (Tower Hamlets Homes), Selina Uddin (East London Business Alliance), Derek Barclay (Circle Housing), Sam Dundas-Dunbar (LBTH Clean & Green Volunteer Co-ordinator), Lesley Pearce (LBTH Green Team), Sripriya Sudhakar (LBTH Strategic Planning).

5. **Review of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)**

JA had circulated a paper in advance of the meeting, with recommendations for each SINC. Terry said that the overall picture presented was very positive, and indicated that biodiversity is being taken seriously and enhanced in the borough. The meeting generally agreed with this view.

John S suggested that the meeting consider each of the sites where the paper proposed a possible change to a SINC. JA introduced each of these, with reasons for his recommendations, and circulated maps of proposed boundary changes where relevant. The proposals were discussed, as follows:

THBI08 Blackwall Basin: Terry said it was important to downgrade where sites have declined, and not to pretend that everything is OK. Others agreed that failure to do so would damage the standing of the SINC system. Harriet asked if the site was still worthy of Borough Grade 2 status, and JA replied that he is confident it is. The proposed revised boundary and downgrade to Borough 2 was agreed.

THBII01 Millwall & West India Docks: this was more for information than decision, as the areas of habitat to be removed had already been lost. The revised boundary was agreed.

THBII06 Spitalfields City Farm & Allen Gardens: JA said this was the only known site in the borough for Great Crested Newts, albeit not of natural origin. Terry said he thought that the introduction took place over 15 years ago, so the population is clearly well-established. It was agreed that, as the only site for a European Protected Species, the site should be upgraded to Borough Grade 1.

THBII07: John S said that the first British discovery of London Rocket was in Whitechapel in the 1650s. Its presence in the area has probably been continuous since then. It has high cultural significance, and Tower Hill is widely recognised as the classic site. While not native, it was included in the

first edition of the plant Red Data Book, and was a London BAP priority species. The meeting agreed that this was sufficient justification for retention of the SINC.

THL03 Disused railway at Fairfoot Road: JA said that, before deciding whether to de-designate the SINC, he would like to arrange a site meeting with Matus and Nick Martin, representing the landowners Tower Hamlets Homes and Poplar Harca, to see if there is support to try to raise funds to eradicate the knotweed and restore the woodland as an asset for residents. Terry asked that FoTHCP be invited to attend, as the site is adjacent to Cemetery Park. Allan said he would not object if the SINC was deleted if it would be a waste of resources trying to restore it. It was agreed to leave the decision on whether to delete the SINC to JA, after a site meeting with relevant parties.

Action: JA to arrange a site meeting with THH, Poplar Harca and FoTHCP to discuss the future of this site. *[post-meeting update: the site visit took place without Poplar Harca, as it transpires the Council owns the whole site. Knotweed was extensive, but not quite as dominant as initially thought. Restoration would be possible, through a significant task. In the meantime, all present (JA, Matus and Terry Lyle) agreed that the site, as a significant area of woodland close to Cemetery Park, is worthy of retaining SINC status]*

THL14 Hermitage Basin: JA said that Hermitage Basin was good for dragonflies, and it seemed logical to include it as part of the SINC that already includes Shadwell Basin and the Wapping Canal, as the canal links the two basins (though there is no hydrological connection). It was agreed to upgrade this to Borough 2, and add it to THB113.

THL22 Millwall Park: there have been significant enhancements to this site over recent years, and it was agreed that it is of much higher value than the other parks which are Sites of Local Importance. The proximity of Mudchute adds to its value. It was agreed to upgrade it to Borough 2.

THL30 Poplar Dock: John S agreed that the ruderal flora on the eastern edge is very interesting, and added that it included Slender Sandwort in addition to the species JA mentioned. It was agreed to extend the boundary as recommended, and to upgrade it to Borough 2.

THL31 Saffron Avenue Pond: this is almost certainly the best site for dragonflies and damselflies in the borough, with probably 8 species breeding and 2 others recorded recently. It was agreed to upgrade it to Borough 2.

Proposed new SINC: the meeting was minded to recommend Elf Green as a Site of Local Importance. It is managed for nature conservation, and provides access to nature in an area with little semi-natural open space. Local residents are very supportive of the meadow. Terry said this would show recognition for EastendHomes' initiative here, and could be a potential exemplar to show other housing providers. Before formally recommending it as a new SINC, it was agreed that Paul should seek the views of EastendHomes management.

Action: Paul to discuss the implications of Elf Green as a new SINC with colleagues, and get back to JA with a view a.s.a.p. *[Post-meeting update: EastendHomes have no objections to SINC designation]*