

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 and 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 THBI09

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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