

Parks and Green Spaces



“ ‘It’s so green...You can walk right across the centre of town through the three Royal Parks – St James’s Park, Green Park, Hyde Park – and your shoes never touch anything but green, green grass. Do you know how far that is?’ ‘A mile or so’, I guessed. ‘It’s four miles’, she said. ‘Four miles of flowers, trees and green! In the heart of one of the biggest cities on the planet!’” (Parsons, 1999)

1. Aims

- To encourage good conservation practice in parks and green spaces across London, respecting their varied functions and the aspirations of local communities.
- To improve access to nature in London’s parks and green spaces, particularly in areas of need.
- To raise awareness of the importance of parks, squares and green spaces in the conservation of London’s biodiversity.

2. Introduction

2.1 General

Parks, squares and other public green spaces¹ are immensely important to city dwellers, in providing an opportunity to spend time out of doors, but near their homes or place of work, in contact with the natural world. This includes both the broader aspects such as landscape, skyline, fresh air and open water, and nature itself as represented by birds, trees, butterflies and wild flowers.

¹ Except where specifically stated the term ‘parks’ will be used for convenience to cover all green spaces defined in 2.2 of this Plan.

Most parks are managed primarily for public recreation rather than specifically for nature conservation. Nonetheless, in an increasingly urbanised society, where the expansion of the city means that true countryside becomes ever more distant, parks come to symbolise pockets of countryside in town. In a recent survey by CABESpace to investigate the most important values people associate with parks, the opportunity to experience nature ranked fourth out of the twenty choices available. For most people, this fits alongside other benefits such as meeting friends, playing sports, taking children to a playground, or simply enjoying a health-giving walk in pleasant surroundings.

However, parks also serve as an ecological resource in their own right, helping to sustain populations of birds and other wildlife in the capital, through providing islands of habitat linked to a wider green network within the built up area. They are also increasingly seen to have a broader environmental role, as part of the green infrastructure of the city, contributing to flood storage, sustainable urban drainage and the city's ability to adapt to climate change. Hence they can play an important part in urban regeneration.

This action plan is being implemented at a time of growing political interest in Britain's parks. Following concern about the state of public parks, the Government set up an Urban Green Spaces Taskforce in 2001 to assess the situation. As a result new planning policy guidance was published, CABE Space was established, and new funding streams were announced. In London, the GLA Assembly's Green Spaces Investigative Committee produced a *'Scrutiny of Green Spaces in London'* (2001), which reviewed the situation within the capital. In 2002, the London Parks and Green Spaces Forum was established to progress the agenda for London's parks. The Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy, launched in 2002, promotes management of London's green spaces to enhance biodiversity and improve opportunities for Londoners to enjoy contact with the natural world. Achieving this vision will depend crucially on the London Boroughs and others who manage London's parks and green spaces.

This action plan aims to inspire real improvements to biodiversity in London's parks. It seeks to work in a holistic way, promoting biodiversity and sustainable practice, while respecting the constraints of practical management, the varied functions of parks, the value of historic landscapes and the needs and aspirations of local communities.

2.2. Scope of plan

This action plan relates to parks, squares and general areas of public green space, ranging from large parks such as Regent's Park (102 ha) and Beddington Park (58 ha) down to local parks and 'pocket parks', which may be less than 0.1 ha in size. It also embraces the south London Metropolitan Commons, garden squares, playing fields and green spaces around housing estates, hospitals and businesses. It does not cover country parks or the former wood pasture parks on the outskirts of London, such as Richmond Park, or sites with large areas of semi-natural habitats such as woodland, heathland or chalk downland, which are covered by other action plans.

3. Current Status

Parks occur in every London borough and together make up about 8% of London's land area, according to a study by the former London Ecology Unit. Most were created

primarily as ornamental gardens offering a range of opportunities for outdoor recreation. Some have an earlier history as Deer Parks, for example Hyde Park, others as common land, such as Streatham Common, and others were former country estates, which were acquired by local authorities. Many were created during the Victorian and Edwardian eras to counteract the effects of overcrowding and a poor environment in an ever-expanding city. Only two large parks (Burgess Park and Mile End Park) have been created in inner London since the Second World War.

In the past, parks management was geared towards a formal quality, focusing on horticultural excellence, and often featuring elaborate flower planting, immaculate lawns and built features such as summerhouses, fountains and bandstands. Spiraling labour costs and accumulative dis-investment over many years have led to a significant deterioration in the quality and detail of formal landscapes. In historic parks alone, it was estimated that across the UK an approximate £1.2bn of funding had been 'removed' between 1979 and 2000. These problems are often exacerbated by social problems, such as vandalism, drug abuse and graffiti. Concerns about public safety may lead to pressure to remove shrubbery, or to replace tall shrubberies with low planting. This has significant implications for biodiversity.

By co-incidence, over a similar period, we have seen an increase in public appreciation of nature in urban areas. 'Wildlife friendly' management techniques have been introduced in a number of parks, possibly in some cases stemming from cost-cutting leading to a search for alternative approaches. The need to embrace sustainable practices has become more widely appreciated, partly through the influence of the Green Flag Award scheme (see 5.2.7).

4. Specific Factors Affecting the Habitat

4.1 Parks management contracts

For the majority of public parks and green spaces, contract specifications are the key tool for implementing management. They are highly influenced by costs, skills-base, and political pragmatism. The long timescales involved and penalties incurred for changes can make them inflexible. However, a limited number of strategic biodiversity-friendly contracts have been implemented, and there are models of similar specifications being applied to certain parks or areas within parks. To encourage this approach CABI Space published guidance for contract managers in 2006 entitled '*Making Contracts Work For Wildlife*'.

4.2 Skills and training

There is a high turnover of staff in the contracting horticultural sector, reflecting the lack of a clear career path, and poor pay and conditions of permanent employees, which in turn leads to increasing use of temporary 'agency' staff. This does not encourage investment in training, and has resulted in a widespread skills shortage. In a full cycle it can lead to an over simplification of contract specifications. None the less, many

individual staff are sensitive to the needs of wildlife, and with greater encouragement this concern could be translated into improved working practice in the longer term.

CABE Space and the London Parks & Green Spaces Forum are working at a strategic level to address the skills gap. In 2002, the Royal Parks and Capel Manor College embarked on the 'Green Heart' initiative, which has now evolved into the **London Green Skills Group**. This will identify the skills required to address the needs of London's green space and pursue a range of training initiatives. At a more local level, some training in habitat management for both volunteers and staff is provided by BTCV, Bankside Open Spaces Trust and Tower Hamlets Environment Trust.

As well as direct training programmes, there is a need for literature offering general guidance on management for biodiversity in parks, tailored to the London environment.

4.3 Pressure for increased use

It is important that all Londoners have access to natural green space. Parks managers are under pressure to increase levels of use, and to encourage visits by new audiences. This is to be welcomed as it should mean more people benefiting from the natural world.

However, without careful management, it can have negative implications for wildlife. For example, erosion of grassland can be a direct effect of increased trampling pressure. There is evidence that increasing populations of scavenger species, such as feral pigeon and carrion crow, may be linked to feeding (e.g. of ducks on ponds) or dropping of litter. Major events in parks, such as pop concerts, which are sometimes a response to the need for funds, may carry implications for wildlife, although sensitive timing which avoids the nesting season, and the retention of quieter refuges can go a long way towards addressing this concern.

4.4 Modernisation of sports facilities

Modernisation of sports facilities can change the character of parks. For example, a change to all-weather pitches removes feeding habitat for blackbirds and thrushes. Conversely, concentrating sports activity on a smaller area, through being able to use pitches every day, could, at least in theory, relieve pressure on other parts of the park. Floodlighting adds a further complication: whilst some birds make use of lit up areas to extend their feeding day, there is concern that some nocturnal birds, mammals and invertebrates, such as moths, may be adversely affected. Floodlighting also extends human disturbance into previously quiet periods. Research is needed to improve our understanding of the impact of floodlighting on wildlife; this may be progressed through the London Bats Species Action Plan.

4.5 Formality, tradition and change

The design of many parks dates from the mid-19th century, and these designs in turn were often a stylisation of an earlier English landscape tradition, with an emphasis on

formality. Although such landscapes are far from natural in the visual sense, they often contain fine old trees, and can support good populations of common birds, provided the structure planting offers suitable cover and the use of chemicals such as herbicides is kept to a minimum. Natural flora tends to fare less well, either because colonisation of ground flora under shrubbery is discouraged or because the mowing regime curtails the growth of wild flowers. It is certainly possible to combine strong historic landscape design with informal meadow or woodland planting to good visual effect.

4.6 Public perception of natural habitats

However, in recent years, we have seen a growing desire for more natural landscapes in urban parks. Unfortunately, whereas the traditional park landscape gives an impression of order and safety, some of these more natural habitats, such as woodland and scrub, may be associated with feelings of insecurity, especially for women and people on their own. Long grass may accumulate litter, and thus seem uncared for. A response has sometimes been to parcel off 'wildlife habitat' into one corner of the park.

This action plan takes the view that wildlife can be encouraged across most of the park, providing the management is sensitive to ecological concerns. For example, leaving areas of long grass and wild flowers can provide breeding habitat for butterflies, though the adults will often visit formal flower borders if suitable nectar species are included. Thrushes will nest in woodland or scrub, but forage on amenity turf nearby.

To gain public support, it is best to introduce new ideas incrementally, with good consultation and interpretation at each stage, and also to recognise that basic maintenance tasks such as litter picking are as important in natural habitats as a flower border. Where security is of concern, especially in well-wooded areas, it may be helpful to liaise with local police to assess the scale of real crime statistics, so the reaction is not disproportionate to the risk involved. Sensitive location of taller vegetation away from entrances and play grounds can help more vulnerable people to feel at ease, whilst having the opportunity to view the wilder areas at a distance.

4.7 Cost

Parks have long been subject to severe financial constraints, particularly associated with the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the 1990s and, to a lesser extent, with its replacement, Best Value. This has major implications for all aspects of management, including ecology. For example, funds may not be available for the mowing machinery needed for wildflower meadows; cost-cutting may lead to herbicide use on flowerbeds and verges, which in turn affects wildlife. Although local authorities are not legally required to fund parks, they are under an obligation to improve them through PSA Target 8. The government is also likely to award greater central funding to those that meet qualitative benchmarks, such as the Green Flag Award (see 5.2.7.).

4.8 Funding programmes

Heritage Lottery Fund's Urban Parks programme has inspired great improvements to some of London's historic parks. In the past few years, these projects have often included enhancements for biodiversity. *Doorstep Greens* and *Millenium Greens*, run by

the Countryside Agency, helped to fund several local initiatives, including the inspirational Waterloo Millennium Green. English Nature's 'Wildspace' programme led to the establishment of Local Nature Reserves in some London parks, such as Wormwood Scrubs Park (Hammersmith), and Beckenham Place Park (Lewisham). It also enabled some excellent outreach work with local communities.

4.9 Loss to development

Whilst many parks are protected through statutory planning, losses of parts of parks and other amenity green spaces to development continue to occur. Most vulnerable are playing fields (especially private under-used sites) and green spaces around housing estates and hospitals (with several London hospital sites lost to housing since the 1990s). In addition, incremental loss occurs through the demand for sports halls, health clubs and other indoor facilities on existing green space.

4.10 Water-body eutrophication

Park lakes and ponds are popular meeting points, but often suffer from severe eutrophication, caused by accumulated silt, overhanging trees, high waterfowl numbers, stocking of bottom-feeding fish, and excessive foodstuff from the public. Many are closed systems which are not easy to maintain in an ecological balance. Eutrophication leads to algal blooms (a public health issue), fish extinctions, increased risk of waterfowl disease and ultimately a smelly and unsightly lake. Lakes are often excluded from park maintenance contracts and hence ignored until a problem arises. Without such intervention, the problem worsens and can normally only be reversed through major funding, as, for example, at Battersea Park (Wandsworth), Clissold Park (Hackney) and Telegraph Hill Park (Lewisham).

4.11 Pesticides

According to PAN UK, the use of pesticides in parks is generally declining, partly through health and safety regulation. Minimising their use is also encouraged by the criteria for the Green Flag Award. A further factor is cost: it is often cheaper to find another way to manage the problem, for example by choosing alternative plants. However, pesticides are still used, and more research is needed to assess their impacts.

4.12 Dogs

Walking with a dog is a fine way to take exercise and dog walkers help to ensure a park is well used. However, dog waste is a public health issue and freely running dogs can increase disturbance to wildlife, in particular to birds which nest close to the ground, such as blackcap or chiffchaff. Areas which are heavily used by dogs may suffer ecologically as the nutrient enriched soil encourages the development of coarse weeds.

4.13 Vegetable plots

A recent trend in some parts of London, particularly where private gardens are in short supply, is the growing of vegetables and flowers in small allotments or community gardens within parks. Providing these are managed on sustainable principles, this is to be welcomed in encouraging healthy outdoor activity, community cohesion, and good habitat for seed-eating birds.

5. Current Action

5.1 Legal and planning status

5.1.1. Nature conservation designations

Over the past few years, several of London's parks (or parts which are managed specifically for wildlife) have been designated as statutory Local Nature Reserves. In addition, many are designated as non-statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. The top tier is the Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation: the five Central Royal Parks and Tooting Bec Common are examples. Below this level, parks may be identified as Sites of Borough or Local Importance for Nature Conservation. Boroughs are required to give strong protection to Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and an appropriate level of protection to Sites of Borough and Local Importance for Nature Conservation in their Local Development Frameworks or Unitary Development Plans. Areas of London which are more than 1km walking distance from an accessible Site of Metropolitan or Borough Importance for Nature Conservation are defined as Areas of Deficiency in access to nature in the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy.

5.1.2 Broader green space planning designations

Planning Policy Guidance note 17 (PPG17) is the main piece of national planning guidance for general green spaces such as parks. It requires local authorities to take a strongly protective stance towards networks of parks and green spaces. It recognises the multi-functionality of most green spaces, and highlights their value to biodiversity.

Regionally, many larger parks and green spaces which lie within the built up area of London (as well as some smaller parks which form part of Green Chains) are designated as Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). Towards the edge of London, some parks carry Green Belt designation. Boroughs are required to give strong protection to MOL and Green Belt by the London Plan. Most boroughs also have policies to protect locally important open spaces in their local plans (UDPs and LDFs). A majority of London's parks are protected in this way.

In addition, many historic gardens and squares are listed in a register of historic landscapes. Local Authorities are required to consult English Heritage regarding development which could affect these sites. The London Squares Act, 1931, offers further protection to most of the squares. The south London Metropolitan Commons have their own specific legal protection. Other planning designations, which offer a degree of protection through recognition of important landscapes, include Conservation Areas and Areas of Special Character.

By contrast, open space within social housing often contains land which falls broadly within the habitat type of this action plan, especially amenity grassland, yet it enjoys little protection from development.

5.2 Other major policy drivers and strategic initiatives

5.2.1 England Biodiversity Strategy

The England Biodiversity Strategy (2002) increased the recognition of urban biodiversity. It's chapter on Towns, Cities & Development contains many references to the existing and latent importance of parks for biodiversity, and identifies a number of objectives for action. Most of these are to be delivered through working with a range of key stakeholders, for example CABE Space, ODPM, and local authorities.

5.2.2 The Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy

A key theme in the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy is to improve access to nature, especially in the areas which currently have least on offer. One of the main targets of his strategy is to reduce the Areas of Deficiency in access to nature. The Parks and Green Spaces action plan can play a key part in meeting this goal.

5.2.3 Open Space Strategies

Local Authorities are currently engaged in developing Open Space Strategies, as required by PPG17 and The London Plan. The Mayor has produced guidance for this process, which will review the supply of open spaces and identify areas of deficiency. The strategies are also expected to promote improvements, hence are likely to become a major influence on the targeting of resources in future.

5.2.4 CABE Space

CABE Space was established in May 2003 to champion excellence in the design and management of parks and green spaces. Funded by the ODPM and DCMS, it is now central to the growing political profile of urban parks. It advises and supports local authorities in preparing green space strategies, conducts and commissions research and raises the political profile of parks. It has published a Manifesto, which identifies biodiversity conservation as one its ten aims, and is also preparing a suite of guides.

5.2.5 London Parks & Green Spaces Forum (LPGSF)

The London Parks & Green Spaces Forum was established in 2001 to progress the agenda for London's parks. It brings together representatives from a wide range of stakeholders who are involved in London's parks, including the GLA, the Corporation of London, The Royal Parks, the Countryside Agency, English Nature, London boroughs and Groundwork (amongst others) and also engages with community groups. It has set up a series of working groups which focus on specific themes. The working group for this Action Plan serves as its biodiversity group, hence it provides a steer on ecological issues for the wider Forum.

5.2.6. Cleaner Safer Greener Communities

In 2004, the Government launched *Cleaner Safer Greener Communities*, a cross-departmental campaign to promote better quality neighbourhoods, including parks and green spaces. Its aim is to address some of the key issues of poor environmental quality

that affect many parts of the country. During 2005 it published a series of 'How to' guides on 'Improving Residential Areas' and 'Creating quality parks and open spaces' for local authorities and other practitioners. PSA Target 8, launched in December 2004, sets out indicators of success to be used in monitoring progress towards the campaign's objectives. One of its benchmarks is the Green Flag Award.

5.2.7 Benchmarks and incentives

The **Green Flag Award** (GFA) was first established in 1996 as a means of promoting sustainable parks management. Its focus has subsequently broadened to encompass all urban green spaces and country parks. The scheme is now managed by ODPM, but administered by the Civic Trust. In 2004-5, 59 London parks and green spaces achieved an award (an increase of six on 2003/4). The GFA family also includes a Green Pennant Award (for community-managed spaces), and Green Heritage Award.

Since 1963, **Britain in Bloom**, run by the Royal Horticultural Society, has grown into the largest horticultural campaign in Europe. Every year, hundreds of communities are involved in regenerating local environments, including parks, by the imaginative planting of trees, shrubs and flowers and by dealing with local environmental issues, such as litter, graffiti and vandalism.

5.2.8 Other strategic initiatives for London's parks

A number of other strategic initiatives are now underway, many of which are likely to directly affect parks and green spaces. The **Green Grid** is a green infrastructure project endeavouring to protect green spaces, promote new areas of public green space and promote the creation of new green links within the Thames Gateway, an area which will be subject to huge regeneration pressures. **Green Arcs** are similar bold landscape projects that endeavour to build links around London extending into parts of the surrounding counties.

The **South East London Green Chain** (SELGC) was established in the late 1970s between Erith and Crystal Palace Park to encourage public access by linking parks and green spaces. 10 years later a network of footpaths called the **Green Chain Walk** was introduced to encourage greater access. Whilst the abolition of the Greater London Council in the mid-1980s prevented further extensions to the Green Chain at that time, a trans-London network of walking routes and cycleways has been created to promote easier access to many parks and green spaces, including the **London Outer Orbital Path** and **Capital Ring**. These are now promoted through Transport for London. Moves are now afoot to extend the Green Chain into the borough of Southwark.

The Mayor's 100 open spaces programme is a strategic programme to create or improve 100 open spaces in London. It places strong emphasis on good design, and encompasses a wide range of open spaces, from urban 'piazzas' to naturalistic parks.

The Mayor's Tree and Woodland Framework provides guidance on the management and use of trees and woodlands and on tree planting – following the overall philosophy, 'Right place, right tree'.

The North and South London River Restoration Strategies will promote major improvements to river channels, restoring a more natural structure, with enhancement to wildlife habitats and improved public access to the waterside. Such projects can represent a real transformation for parks which lie along river corridors.

5.3 Mechanisms Targeting the Habitat

These current actions are ongoing. They need to be supported and continued in addition to the new action listed under Section 7.

5.3.1 Exploiting changes in management

Before the recent rise in interest in urban wildlife conservation, most of the wildlife in parks occurred largely as a by-product of traditional management. For example, tree planting and shrubbery designed for people also proved to be attractive to birds; lawns provided feeding grounds for blackbird and mistle thrush, and corners of undisturbed undergrowth supported woodmouse and hedgehog. However, as noted above, by no means all the flora and fauna of the urban environment could thrive under this management.

A mixture of benign neglect, loss of resources and changes in staff over the past 25 years, together with new thinking on the role and function of parks, has led to a growing desire for more natural approaches to management, which could support a wider range of wildlife. The key for this action plan must be to grasp these opportunities through a co-ordinated programme of action.

5.3.2 Management and habitat creation for wildlife and people

In recent years, we have seen an increase in practical initiatives designed to improve the wildlife habitat in parks. A pioneer was L. B. Merton, when - in 1976 - it allowed an area of amenity grass on Cannon Hill Common to grow into a meadow, resulting in the re-appearance of many interesting wild flowers. Many other parks managers have now experimented with meadow creation, drawing on a variety of different approaches, ranging from simple relaxation of the grass-mowing regime, through to sowing annual or perennial wildflower meadows. The restoration of Mile End Park, Tower Hamlets, in the 1990s, is a fine example of what can be done, including large areas of wild flowers and several fine ponds. At Clapton Park Housing Estate, Hackney, the creation of wild flower plots and planting of native trees have brought colour and life to a very urban landscape.

Improvements to woodland and scrub have also been undertaken, both to enhance the habitat and to improve security. For example, L B Wandsworth carried out coppicing and scrub thinning on Tooting Common, both to facilitate access for management tasks and

to encourage more people to explore these areas. Groundwork west London undertook scrub management on Wormwood Scrubs both to encourage access and to create basking areas for the park's important colony of common lizards.

As well as practical initiatives, new thinking has been taking place about the role of parks in the urban environment. This is encapsulated in a new leaflet, 'Natural values', produced by English Nature and London Wildlife Trust, which promotes an appreciation of the role of parks in the city's 'green infrastructure' and encourages a more sustainable approach to their management.

5.3.3 Interpretation and ranger service

Some boroughs, for example Ealing and Islington, have well-developed interpretive services, offering guided walks, leaflets and public events. In others, similar activities may be led by volunteers or staff of voluntary organisations (e.g. BTCV in Haringey, and London Wildlife Trust in Barking & Dagenham). In Lewisham, the contractor (Glendale) provides these services. Recognising the value of on-site staff, CABI Space has launched 'ParkForce' - a public campaign to promote the re-establishment of site-based staff who not only provide security but also interact with the public.

Environmental education centres have been established in some parks, such as the Environment Centre on Wandsworth Common and the Look Out Centre in Hyde Park. Wildlife for All, established by the RSPB and Royal Parks in 2002, was an imaginative HLF-funded three year project aiming to promote wildlife and raise awareness in communities who traditionally underuse the Royal Parks. It ran specially targeted events for minority groups (such as Greenwich Ajoda, a local housing support group for older Africans), as well as an environmental education activities for nearby schools.

A variety of interpretive signs and leaflets have been developed to encourage people to learn about the wildlife in their local parks. In the absence of staff, these have a useful role to play, but protecting signs from graffiti can be a challenge.

5.3.4 Survey and Monitoring

All parks and green spaces above 0.25 ha will undergo survey as part of the Mayor's 10 year rolling programme of open space and habitat survey. The data gathered since 2001 not only details habitats and species, but also information such as accessibility, land use and recreational facilities. It is managed and made available by Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL), the open space and biodiversity records centre for Greater London. From the data, it will be possible to monitor long-term changes in wildlife habitats.

The British Trust for Ornithology's 'Birds in London parks' survey looked at bird life across about 300 London green spaces between 2002 and 2004, reporting in 2005. A study of smaller parks and squares in central London was undertaken as part of the first version of this action plan in 2004. The results are informing the group's work on landscaping in relation to security. However, such surveys do not address changes in population over time. Longer-term monitoring of bird populations has been undertaken in a few parks; an example is a long running bird survey in the central Royal Parks. But unfortunately, even relatively simple bird monitoring procedures, such as Standard

Walks, may be beyond the resources of boroughs to implement from staff time, except perhaps in a few priority sites. Wildlife monitoring therefore depends upon the willingness of suitably qualified volunteers. It is increasingly recognized that simpler forms of wildlife recording are needed to encourage new audiences to take part.

Another important aspect of monitoring is people’s attitudes to parks, as exemplified by the ‘Welcome Audits’ promoted by University College of London. Since one of the aims of this Action Plan is to improve people’s enjoyment of wildlife in parks, it is essential that any major enhancement proposals include a sound assessment of local opinion.

5.3.5 “Friends of...” groups

Many Authorities encourage the formation of ‘Friends of...’ groups. These can promote commitment to parks, campaign against threats, and encourage volunteering, for example in wildlife recording. The Civic Trust provides a supporting network for groups.

5.3.6 Housing estates

The green spaces around social housing are often the poorest in terms of their benefits to people and wildlife. *Neighbourhoods Green*, a project led by Notting Hill Housing Group and Peabody Trust since 2004, and supported by CABI Space, English Nature and Groundwork London, aims to improve the social housing sector’s approach to green space design, management and use. Part-funded by the ODPM, it will provide guidance for the sector, including that on providing benefits to wildlife.

6. Flagship species

These special plants and animals are characteristic of parks, squares and community green space in London.

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|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Oxeye daisy | <i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i> | Attractive brightly coloured daisy, attractive to insects. |
| Buttercups | <i>Ranunculus</i> spp. | Bulbous buttercup -An early flowering buttercup, grows in less intensively managed lawns. Meadow buttercup grows in areas of longer grass. |
| Song thrush | <i>Turdus philomelos</i> | National BAP species, which has declined seriously since the 1970s. |
| House sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | The Cockney sparrer was once a familiar sight in London’s parks, but now is sadly in decline. |
| Bumble bees | <i>Bombus</i> spp | Found foraging for nectar in flowerbeds. |
| Holly blue butterfly | <i>Celastrina argiolus</i> | Small butterfly breeding mainly on holly and ivy, but also uses some other shrubs. Occurs in squares. |
| Meadow brown butterfly | <i>Maniola jurtina</i> | Typical of areas of long grassland, where management is sympathetic to butterflies. |
| Hedgehog | <i>Erinaceus europaeus</i> | Relict populations in suburban and a few central London parks, but known to be declining. |

7. Objectives, Actions and Targets

Most of these actions are specific to this habitat. However, there are other, broader actions that apply generically to a number of habitats and species. These are located in a separate 'Generic Action' section, which should be read in conjunction with this paper. There are generic actions for Site Management, Habitat Protection, Species Protection, Monitoring, Biological Records, Communications and Funding.

Please note that the partners identified in the tables are those that have been involved in the process of forming the plan. It is not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcomed and needed. The leads identified are responsible for co-ordinating the actions – but are not necessarily implementers.

Objective 1 Promote best practice for biodiversity in London's parks and green spaces

Target: Widespread improvements to biodiversity management in London parks by 2010

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|--|------|-----------------------|
| 1.1 Establish a parks and nature conservation forum linked to the recently proposed London Parks Forum | Achieved as biodiversity group of LPGSF 2002 | GLA | LPGSF, LAs, TRP, CoL |
| 1.2. Maintain Biodiversity Working Group of London Parks and Green Spaces Forum to develop the agenda for biodiversity and access to nature in London's Parks, and to facilitate networking for exchange of information and advice. | Ongoing | GLA | BWG, LPGSF |
| 1.3. Organise a conference on London's parks and squares | 2004. Achieved in part through contributing to an international conference. | GLA | LPF, TRP, EH, CoL, LA |
| 1.4 Continue a programme of seminars on cross-cutting issues linked to biodiversity in parks for a range of parks professionals | 2 per year | GLA | BWG, CABESpace, LPGSF |

| | | | |
|---|---|------|------------------------------|
| 1.5. Produce booklet highlighting exemplars of best practice, drawn from the parks management audit, promoting sustainable practice for biodiversity in London's parks, and targeted at parks management, grounds maintenance contractors and others with a serious interest in parks management. | 2007 | GLA | BWG |
| 1.6. Undertake a study of wildlife in squares to produce a best practice guide | 2003. achieved as LPGSF survey of small parks & squares | GLA | EH, LPGT, LWT, TRP, MPGA, GE |
| 1.7. Produce booklet, based on findings of LPGSF survey, on managing small parks and squares for wildlife. | 2006 | RSPB | BWG, EH, LPGT, TRP, MPGA, GE |

Objective 2 To build up a picture of recent work to enhance biodiversity in London parks and green spaces

Target : Audit completed 2006

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|-------------|------|------------------------------|
| 2.1 Undertake audit of recent biodiversity initiatives and scope for improvement in London's parks and green spaces, identifying possible sites for enhancement, especially in areas of need. | 2006 | GLA | BWG, LAs, TRP, CoL, LVRP, GW |

Objective 3. Ensure that biodiversity is fully included in strategic programmes for London, which have a bearing on parks and green spaces

Target: Biodiversity issues well represented in all relevant, major strategic documents by 2010

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|--|----------------|---------|----------------------|
| 3.1 Ensure that biodiversity enhancements are incorporated wherever possible in the Mayor's 100 open spaces programme | Review in 2007 | GLA | LAs, LWT, GW? |
| 3.2 Ensure that proposals for the east London Green Grid acknowledge the broader ecological function of parks and promote biodiversity enhancements to appropriate green spaces. | Review in 2007 | EN, GLA | LAs, LWT, GW?, LVRPA |

| | | | |
|--|----------------|-----|-----|
| 3.3 Ensure that Borough Open Space Strategies promote biodiversity improvements in parks and green spaces, especially in areas of need | Review in 2007 | LAs | GLA |
|--|----------------|-----|-----|

Objective 4 Encourage biodiversity enhancements in London parks and green spaces, particularly in areas of need.

Target: Undertake biodiversity improvements in at least ten parks by 2007, including at least five in or near Areas of Deficiency in access to nature

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|--|----------|----------------|
| 4.1. Work with appropriate boroughs to identify parks or open spaces where improvements could be made, subject to public consultation | This proposal in the original HAP has now been redrafted as 4.2, 4.3, 4.4. and 4.5 | GLA | LA |
| 4.2 Refine list of priority sites and proposals for their enhancement, as identified in parks audit, especially in or near 'Areas Of Deficiency in access to nature'. | 2006 | GLA | LAs, GW, BWG |
| 4.3 In consultation with LAs, seek funding for enhancement to these priority sites. | 2005 onwards | GLA | LAs, GW, MPGA |
| 4.4 Implement improvements on priority sites, following consultation with communities. | 2006 onwards | LAs | GLA, LVRPA |
| 4.5 Undertake biodiversity enhancements and improvements in sustainable practice in parks more generally. | ongoing | BWG | LAs, TRP, MPGA |
| 4.6 Promote the inclusion of biodiversity enhancements in the objectives for appropriate parks which are being restored through HLF's Urban Parks Programme. | 2005 onwards | LAs | |
| 4.7. Promote habitat enhancements in social housing estates | 2008 | PT | LWT/PT |
| 4.8 Collate information on progress towards this objective annually. | From 2006 | GLA/LB P | BWG, LAs |

Objective 5 To promote wildlife recording and monitoring in London's parks and green spaces

Target: Increase in number of volunteers recording wildlife in London's parks and green spaces by 2008

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|-------------|----------|----------------------|
| 5.1 Develop simple wildlife recording form for use by non specialists in consultation with GIGL | 2006 | TRP/GIGL | GLA, LAs |
| 5.2 Support and promote wildlife recording by volunteers and encourage submission of records to GIGL and (where appropriate) London Bird Report | 2008 | BWG | TRP, LNHS, LAs, GIGL |

Objective 6 To promote and enhance the enjoyment of nature and landscape in parks, squares and amenity grassland

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|---------------------------------|------|----------------|
| 6.1 (previously objective 4) Review literature on 'welcome audits' and collate existing information from park officers to investigate people's sense of security and welcome in relation to landscape and wilderness areas in parks. | Achieved as Student MSc thesis. | UCL | GLA, EN |

Relevant Action Plans

London Plans

Churchyards and Cemeteries; Reedbeds; Acid Grassland; Rivers and Streams; House Sparrow; Grey Heron; Bats; Stag Beetle; Mistletoe.

National Plans

Built Environment and Gardens.

England Biodiversity Strategy (Towns, Cities and Development).

Key References

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Web-links

CABE Space: www.cabespace.org.uk

Cleaner Safer Greener: www.cleanersaferegreener.org.uk

Green Flag Awards: www.greenflagawards.org.uk

London Parks & Green Spaces Forum:

Neighbourhoods Green: www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk

Wildlife for All: www.rspb.org.uk/wildlifeforall/

Abbreviations

| | |
|--|---|
| BTO – British Trust for Ornithology | LPGSF – London Parks & Green Spaces Forum |
| BWG – Biodiversity Working Group | LNHS – London Natural History Society |
| CoL – Corporation of London | LVRPA – Lee Valley Regional Park Authority |
| DCMS – Department of Culture Media and Sport | LWT – London Wildlife Trust |
| EH – English Heritage | MPGA – Metropolitan Public Gardens Association |
| EN – English Nature | ODPM – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister |
| GE – The Grosvenor Estate | PAN – Pesticides Action Network |
| GLA – Greater London Authority | PT – Peabody Trust |
| GIGL – Greenspace Information for Greater London | TRP – The Royal Parks |
| GW – Groundwork Trusts | RSPB Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. |
| LPGT – London Parks & Gardens Trust | UCL- University College London |
| LA – Local Authorities | |

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