

Duty bound?

Biodiversity conservation in London boroughs - expanding the agenda



A new duty for London boroughs

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 states that:
“Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”.

National guidance setting out how local authorities can fulfil this duty has been issued by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) (see further information). This document complements the national guidance by providing information and case studies of particular relevance to London Boroughs.

Why conserve biodiversity?
Biodiversity encompasses the plants and animals both familiar and unfamiliar to all of us where we live and work, the habitats they need to survive, and the processes operating in



the natural environment on which we depend and can often benefit from. These range widely, providing cultural, social and economic benefits. For example, contact with nature and the natural environment can help physical and mental well-being. Equally, working with nature and conserving and utilising natural systems could have a particularly important part to play in helping the Capital combat the effects of climate change.



Biodiversity is also our natural heritage. In London with its strong diversity of communities, people’s cultural and aesthetic relationships with biodiversity are particularly important. It is a common good which may be enjoyed and understood by all, irrespective of social and economic differences.

The existing framework
Despite their predominantly urban character, London boroughs have often placed a strong commitment on biodiversity conservation through identifying and protecting a network of sites of importance for nature conservation. These not only serve to conserve wildlife; they also contribute to people’s quality of life by enhancing the local environment and providing areas of accessible natural greenspace for local residents to enjoy.

The Mayor of London has provided a policy framework (*Connecting with London’s nature* - the Mayor’s Biodiversity Strategy), which has translated national policy to the regional level, addressing the special circumstances of London. This strategy recognises the fundamental role that biodiversity conservation has in helping to make London a green and pleasant city.

Making the links

The new duty encourages London boroughs to consider biodiversity conservation as a cross-cutting agenda that can be integrated with the delivery of a wide range of services. Biodiversity conservation should not be viewed solely as an environmental issue, but a core component of sustainable development. It can contribute to a

range of quality-of-life indicators across several local authority service areas. This cross-cutting approach should be manifest in the Borough’s own Biodiversity Action Plan, which itself should be part of the Borough’s Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The following table illustrates how biodiversity conservation objectives could be integrated into the core services provided by London boroughs. The subsequent case studies give examples of the benefits for people as well as benefits for biodiversity.

Function or Service	Potential link to biodiversity conservation	Beneficial outcomes
Land use planning and development control	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notification of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (Local/Wildlife Sites) in Local Development Frameworks• Identifying spatial opportunities for ecological enhancement in Area Action Plans• Securing enhancement, mitigation or compensation through planning conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protection of wildlife species and their habitats• Extension, enhancement & improved connectivity of existing wildlife habitats; meeting national & local Biodiversity Action Plan targets
Provision and management of greenspace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivery of Biodiversity Action Plan targets and accessible natural greenspace standards through Open Space/Greenspace Strategies• Declaration of Local Nature Reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extension, enhancement & improved connectivity of existing wildlife habitats• Site safeguard; access to dedicated funding streams
Health and promotion of wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving and enhancing both management of & access to natural greenspace, thereby reducing Areas of Deficiency in access to nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved access to nature & natural landscapes for Londoners, raising general fitness levels & significantly benefiting physical and mental health

Function or Service	Potential link to biodiversity conservation	Beneficial outcomes
Housing and management of council buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusion of biodiversity assessment and indicators in Estate Audit and Asset Management Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Benefits to wildlife associated with built environment• Immediate access to 'doorstep' nature, improving general mental health
Education and community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotion of biodiversity conservation through education and advisory services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awareness of & sensitivity to issues embedded within future generations
Regeneration and economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusion of green infrastructure objectives in Regeneration Strategies and Masterplans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhanced local property valuation standards
Highways and transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ecological assessments to inform management and enhancement of estate (road verges, street trees etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creation, enhancement & improved connectivity of existing wildlife habitats• Visually enhanced journey experiences by public & private transport
Leisure Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using biodiversity assets to promote tourism and enhance local amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting local economic & regeneration aspirations
Waste management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making use of and recycling arisings from grass-cutting, tree-cutting, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting recycling targets for decreased municipal waste volumes
Organisational Development (Human resources)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing staff loyalty and ownership of corporate objectives through volunteering strategies and green exercise programmes linked to Local Nature Reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Career development• Enhanced staff morale & retention; lower absenteeism through sickness

Land use planning

ISLINGTON



© Steve Bainbridge



© Steve Bainbridge



London Borough of Islington

Green Construction Supplementary Planning Guidance

Project funding for the Local Biodiversity Action Plan in Islington has been directly supported through application/implementation of the Borough Council's Green Construction Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). The SPG (soon to be replaced by a Supplementary Planning Document) strongly signals a requirement to see biodiversity designed into new developments. But if new developments fail in this the Town & Country Planning Act Section 106 mechanism is used to collect a contribution of between £500-5000, depending on the scale of the scheme, targeted at funding Local BAP projects. The density of the built environment in Islington and associated lack of open space is used to argue the appropriateness of generic borough-wide use of this funding on projects as they arise.

Projects benefiting from the policy include a Wildlife Gardening information pack available for residents, the installation of a green roof on the Council Offices in Upper Street, and habitat enhancements on the Regent's Canal, worth c£40,000.

http://www.islington.gov.uk/Environment/Planning/PlanningPolicy/Planning_Obligations/106_process.asp#muscat_highlighter_first_match

Top & middle: wetland habitat enhancements on the Regent's Canal
Bottom: detail on green roof

5

Provision of greenspace

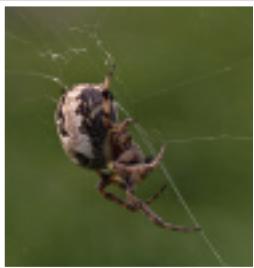
London Borough of Lambeth *Open Spaces Strategy*



© Iain Boulton



© Iain Boulton



Lambeth contains many areas where greenspace and access to the natural environment is poor. Informed by the local Biodiversity Action Plan and Parks Strategic Plan, Lambeth's Open Space Strategy is being used to address these deficiencies by improving the biodiversity value of both new and existing greenspaces.

At Kennington Park, which lies in a large Area of Deficiency in access to nature (AOD), a new 'Greenlink' was created on derelict contaminated land to connect the original Victorian park to a nearby extension. This has improved access to the main park by residents from nearby housing estates. The Greenlink not only increased the net area of the actual park, but it is also the focus of the 'Kennington Meadows' project, which aims to create up to 0.8 hectares of species-rich meadow grassland in and around the park.

Similarly, 'Lambeth Walk Doorstep Green' has resulted in significant improvements in the biodiversity value of an existing open space lying within an area of high-density social housing with poor existing provision of green space. The Green is also adjacent to three schools (including one for Special Needs) and a training centre for young adults with learning difficulties, thus providing children, parents and young adults with easy access to wildlife habitats and species.

<http://www.crossriverpartnership.org/page.asp?id=1244>

Waste management

London Borough of Croydon *TreeStation*



© BioRegional



© Andy Aitcheson



© BioRegional

Trees don't just grow in woodlands. In an urban setting like Croydon, trees along streets and in parks and gardens are vitally important. The council was the first local authority worldwide to gain FSC certification for the management of all the woodlands and trees for which it is responsible.

Working with BioRegional, the TreeStation in Croydon has been established primarily to use the wood produced by arboriculture within the borough. Wood is diverted away from the waste stream and used to make a variety of products. Charcoal was made for 4 years up until 2000 and the small proportion of high quality logs were sawn for timber using the *TreeStation's* mobile sawmill. When the exemplar sustainable development at BedZED was built, charcoal-making ceased and a woodchip production unit was developed. City Suburban Tree Surgeons have been running the site as a commercial venture since March 2006. Arboricultural waste arising from management of the Council's own trees and from tree surgeons working elsewhere are accepted at the site.

http://www.bioregional.com/programme_projects/forestry_prog/urban_forestry/urbfor_trees.htm

Top: *TreeStation*
Middle: turning tree waste into fuel using a large Jenz chipper
Bottom: wood chippings

Housing and management of council buildings

London Borough of Southwark

Countisbury House and Lapse Wood Housing Estate
grounds management



© Mathew Frith



© Mike Waite



© John Somerville

The lawns of the 1960s Countisbury House estate in Upper Sydenham harbour a large population of a rare wildflower – corky-fruited water-dropwort. On advice from London Wildlife Trust the Council, after consultation with their grounds maintenance contractor and local residents, adopted a mowing regime adjusted to benefit this plant and other wildflowers present in the lawns. Residents are delighted with their enhanced floral outlook and the example of the Countisbury House estate has fuelled interest elsewhere in the borough to provide less-manicured and more diverse grounds to estates.

The Neighbourhoods Green partnership of social landlords has published guidance - *A natural estate* - funded by Natural England, which illustrates simple measures that can be adopted to enhance the biodiversity and attractiveness of housing estates.

<http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/Ingl/resources/publications/A%20natural%20estate.pdf>

Top: Countisbury House estate
Bottom (both): corky-fruited water-dropwort

Regeneration and economic development

London Borough of Greenwich and London Borough of Lewisham

Regeneration of Deptford Creek



© Environment Agency



© G. Kadas

In 1996 the Environment Agency realised that most of the flood defence walls of Deptford Creek were failing with a consequential severe risk of future flooding. Surveys suggested that major repair works needed to be undertaken. Deptford was also a focus for economic regeneration. The London Boroughs of Lewisham and Greenwich in partnership with developers, riverfront businesses and the Environment Agency joined together to use the ‘cost’ of river wall repairs over the next 5 years as match funding to secure Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funds from Central Government for a range of regeneration initiatives.

In addition to pump-priming economic regeneration through establishing new transport infrastructure and land assembly, the SRB funded an environmental programme to integrate flood defence works with the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of the Creek. This resulted in innovative solutions for flood defence walls which incorporate a variety of features to encourage colonisation by wildlife.

In addition, an environmental education centre has been built which provides a focus for programmes which raise awareness of the ecology of the creek and surrounding urban habitats.

http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/commondata/acrobat/r_walker_light_1366380.pdf

Top: new river walls
Bottom: the Creekside Centre

Highways

London Borough of Bromley

Walking with Beetles



The Walking with Beetles Project focuses on 'The Beck Corridor'. Funded by the EU LIFE Environment Fund and Transport for London, its main focus is to promote walking and sustainable transport through improving awareness of a greenspace corridor and its wildlife. Work has involved the enhancement of the corridor including the planting of roadside trees, creation of stag beetles loggeries, planting of wildflowers in verges, schools and churchyards and the provision of bird, bee and bat boxes to local gardeners. A series of publications have also been produced and includes:

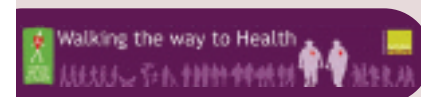
- A walk pack that promotes the observation of wildlife on the way to and from school and helps to support the Walking Bus initiative.
- A 'Walking with Beetles File of Educational Activities' will help to deliver the biodiversity, walking and sustainable transport message to Key Stage 1-3 pupils at school through lesson plans and work sheets.
- An 'Explore the Beck Corridor' pack incorporates advice on walking, the observation of green space from public transport, and suggested walking routes.

www.bromleybiodiversity.co.uk

Promotion of wellbeing

London Borough of Havering

Local Area Agreement (LAA) Stretch Target to promote Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)



© London Borough of Havering



© London Borough of Havering



© London Borough of Havering

With its partners on the Havering Strategic Partnership the Council wants to improve health and well-being and reduce health inequalities amongst Havering residents, through increasing access to green spaces and the countryside. Consequently the Council have agreed to declare four statutory LNRs to help conserve biodiversity and to provide venues for health initiatives such as the Walking the way to Health Initiative and the Thames Chase THERAPI Project (Tackling Health through Environmental Regeneration and Public Involvement).

Including this as an LAA stretch target yielded pump priming funding of £80k, which has enabled the recruitment of a Project Officer to co-ordinate the initiative.

If Havering is successful in completing this stretch target by 2010 the Council will receive £300,000 in reward grant from central government.

<http://www.havering.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=8261>

*Top: Cranham Brickfields proposed LNR
Middle: Walking the way to Health
Bottom: Bedfords Park proposed LNR*

Community engagement

London Borough of Croydon

Community Partnership Officer



© Meike Weiser



© Meike Weiser



© Chris Woods

The Community Partnership Officer's primary role is to support the voluntary efforts of the 20 local 'Friends' groups involved in supporting the management of greenspace within the borough. Support includes advice on governance and structure, where to go for sources of funding, health & safety, insurance requirements, training for essential skills such as use of tools and first aid, publicising the groups and their sites and recruitment of new volunteers. The work undertaken by volunteers amounts to over six times the salary of the Community Partnership Officer. In addition to helping the Council conserve and enhance its natural greenspaces the Friends groups provide a valuable social network, strengthening communities and encouraging local ownership and stewardship of local greenspaces.

<http://www.croydon.gov.uk/100006/countryside/congroups/groups>

*Top: story time in Selsdon Wood
Middle: community heather seed gathering in Addington Hills
Bottom: volunteer work*

The challenge for London boroughs

The new biodiversity duty requires London boroughs to think more holistically about biodiversity conservation. It is a challenge to think laterally about the delivery of services. The case-studies above show how the consideration of biodiversity conservation can be a catalyst for the implementation of innovative approaches that are beneficial to people as well as wildlife. But there are other areas to explore:

Evidence based decision-making - all decision making should be based on good evidence and up-to-date information. It is essential that London Boroughs have access to good data in



order to properly address the biodiversity duty. Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL)

provides this service for London Boroughs. GIGL is a not-for-profit organisation established with support from Natural England, the Mayor of London, London Wildlife Trust and the London Biodiversity Partnership. Using the services of GIGL is an obvious way for a borough to demonstrate it is fulfilling its biodiversity duty. <http://www.gigl.org.uk/>

Procurement – there is much more to value-for-money than just finding the cheapest tenderer. Costing procurement from a ‘whole life’ viewpoint reduces the toll on the environment through savings on energy and resources, as well as waste disposal, maintenance and replacement by using more durable goods. All London boroughs have policies that help conserve biodiversity through seeking to avoid the use of peat or unsustainably harvested timber. But procurement policies could also be used to support local biodiversity. For example,

planting schemes in parks and open spaces could be using seeds and plants grown locally from planting material sourced from local nature reserves; small amounts of quality timber could be sourced from local woodlands; grounds maintenance contracts could be let to companies which have proven ecological expertise and appropriately skilled staff, or who use environmentally-friendly weed and pest control methods.



© Chris Woods

Organisational development – all London boroughs have policies and programmes that seek to develop and support their staff. These include team-building events and initiatives to encourage healthy living. Most London boroughs have statutory Local Nature Reserves owned and managed by them, or own and manage other sites of conservation value. There is an obvious potential to link staff development, team building and healthy exercise with the management and improvement of Local Nature Reserves and similar sites. Such programmes tend to raise staff morale by offering opportunities for personal and career development, thereby promoting staff retention. Improved staff health will reflect in lowered absenteeism through sickness.

Further information

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/pdf/ukpga_20060016_en.pdf

DEFRA guidance - Guidance for Local Authorities on Implementing the Biodiversity Duty
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/pdfs/biodiversity/la-guid-english.pdf>

London's Life-Force – natural values in community strategies
<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/resourcefiles/20050801100723LndnLF.pdf>



Acknowledgements

This guidance document was prepared by Peter Massini (Natural England), Nick White (London Biodiversity Partnership) and Mike Waite (Greater London Authority)
Design by Metalanguage Design