



Railway Linesides

Aims of the Railway Linesides Action Plan

- To raise awareness of the importance of railway linesides in Lambeth as a significant wildlife habitat resource and for their contribution to local biodiversity.
- To raise awareness of the importance of railway linesides as 'green corridors' enabling wildlife species to migrate into, through and across the Borough.
- To encourage sensitive and sympathetic management of the Lambeth's railway corridors and lineside habitats to both protect and enhance their current and future biodiversity status.

A) Why are railway linesides important for biodiversity?

'Railway lineside' describes the vegetated lands adjacent to operational above-surface railways, and includes railway embankments, cuttings, areas around stations and by junctions, above tunnel mouths, and derelict sidings and marshalling yards. Habitats present on railway linesides include grassland, scrub, woodland and ruderal vegetation, all of which have become colonised by additional wildlife habitats and many wildlife species.

Railway linesides provides many wild species with a ideal means to spread, colonise and disperse across large areas, acting as 'green corridors' for the movement of plants and animals where traditional routes for movement may not exist or are fragmented due to developments or other pressures.

B) Where are the railway linesides in Lambeth?

There are 23.41 kilometres of 'railway corridor land' in the Borough of Lambeth, which is about 2.9% of the London total. About 40 ha of Lambeth is classified as 'railway lineside', which is about 1.47% of the total area of the Borough. Although making up a small proportion of the Borough's total area, Lambeth's railway linesides in Lambeth make up a significant contribution to its biodiversity status.

28.9 hectares of railway lineside land in Lambeth are classified as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), both of Local or Borough Importance, which equates to 3.34% of the London total for railside SINCs.

The main areas of SINC railside land are in the south-central portion of the Borough, with five main stretches: Peabody Hill Railway Linesides, Streatham RAILSIDES, South Streatham RAILSIDES, Streatham Common to Norbury, and West Norwood RAILSIDES.

C) Why do we need an Action Plan for Lambeth's railway linesides?

Poor or inadequate management of railway linesides is a major factor in reducing their biodiversity value. Current railside management is to meet operational and safety standards, for instance, prevention of trees growing too near tracks. As a result a 15m swathe is regularly clear felled adjacent to railway lines – this is inadequate to maintain existing grassland, nor can it help in restoring grassland which has since evolved into scrub and woodland.

Another threat to railway lineside biodiversity is loss of habitat through development and operational requirements, especially the loss of marshalling yards and reduction of space around junctions to housing. Recent proposals for new strategic rail links, e.g. London Crossrail, could require existing railway corridors to be widened, so removing substantial areas of existing railway lineside habitat without providing replacement habitats.

The increasing use of contractors for lineside management means works are driven by financial and contract performance targets with little leeway for landscape or nature conservation considerations. Contractors can be reluctant to alter work timings or patterns to take into account nature conservation issues when encountered out of season or routine.

'Traditional' management perceptions may generate a bias against vegetation on or close to railway land, because of concerns over effects on the smooth and safe running of rail operations. Some might feel it is better to remove a risk altogether, removing or vigorously cutting back lineside vegetation. Concerns over litigation from injured parties following accidents might reinforce this attitude, with a 'better not wait for it to happen' attitude forcing vegetation to be removed altogether.

Railway linesides suffer from flytipping and vandalism: this makes railway operators keep linesides closely mown and free of fire risks, or remove places for flytipping to be dumped or hidden – areas of good wildlife habitat are often lost if this is not carefully managed.

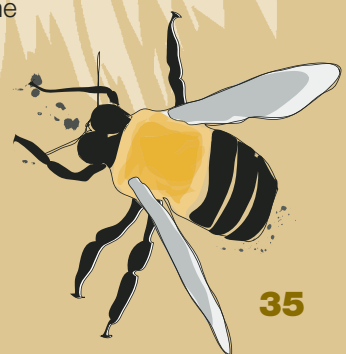
A range of highly invasive or alien plants, such as Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Sycamore, Rhododendron, Cherry Laurel and Buddleja are now abundant along many sections of railway lineside. These plants dominate indigenous wild plants or shade out normal ground flora, so affecting species richness and distribution on the lineside.

Railway maintenance companies can view herbicides as a cheap and effective way to control invasive plants choking up railway linesides, but also to keep scrub, grassland and woodland under check, and prevent them becoming a safety and operational problem. However, herbicides are indiscriminate in the plant species and habitats they control, and many indigenous native species can be affected or eliminated as a consequence if application is inappropriate or not managed.

D) What is the legal status of Lambeth's railway linesides?

All those sections of railway lineside land in Lambeth designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation Interest (SINC) in the Lambeth Unitary Development Plan (UDP) are protected from loss or inappropriate development.

The Lambeth UDP also recognises the importance of railway lineside land for nature conservation and as 'green corridors' for wildlife movement and dispersal. The UDP also recognises the need for rail operators and developers to consider the wildlife interest of railside land surplus to operational requirements before applying for any change of use.



E) What will the Railway Linesides Action Plan do?

Objective 1. We will improve knowledge and understanding of the nature conservation interest and biodiversity value of railside land within Lambeth. A Borough-wide audit of railway land, to identify sites of existing biodiversity value, and areas with potential to increase biodiversity value, will be undertaken by 2007.

Objective 2. We will promote good management of railway land in Lambeth for the benefit of nature conservation and resident habitats and species. As part of this process a partnership with railway land operators and interest groups will be established by 2007.

Objective 3. We will improve public and commercial awareness of wildlife in, and the biodiversity importance of, railway land in Lambeth. A programme of talks, walks, information and training to rail landowners and operators, Members, officers, schools and community organisations will be established and delivered by 2009.

F) Who is involved in the Railway Linesides Action Plan?

1. Partnerships

The Lead Partner for the Lambeth Railway Linesides Action Plan is Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces Business Unit (Lambeth Parks). Other Co-Lead Partners include Lambeth Planning

The Lead Community Partner would be the Lambeth Parks and Greenspaces Forum (LPGF), acting to co-ordinate community responses to any proposed changes in railway lineside management or developments. Other Partners include Network Rail, Train Operating Companies (TOCs), London Wildlife Trust, and the London Natural History Society.

2. Contact for information

For more information on the Lambeth Railway Linesides Action Plan, including copies of this plan in paper or electronic format, please contact:

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3. Further information and advice

Further advice on railway lineside habitats, and their management and protection for nature conservation and biodiversity, can be found on the following websites.

- DEFRA (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/Science/GeneticResources/Access/In-Situ/Railtrack.asp>)
- Network Rail (<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/index.htm>)
- London Underground (<http://tube.tfl.gov.uk/content/about/report/environment/>)
- London Wildlife Trust – advice on the importance of railway linesides: (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/resourcefiles/20040625141747Wild+rail+linesides.doc>)
- Greater London Authority (<http://www.london.gov.uk/londonissues/>)