



The Built Environment



Aims of the Built Environment Action Plan

- To highlight the importance of buildings and other features comprising the built environment of Lambeth for wild plants and animals and for local biodiversity.
- To raise and sustain awareness of the need to protect and enhance buildings and built features of biodiversity importance through the formal planning and building control process.
- To promote 'good practice' in the management of buildings and built environment in Lambeth in order to retain, protect and enhance their biodiversity and nature conservation value.

A) Why is the 'built environment' important for biodiversity'?

The 'built environment' refers to a structure or feature erected, installed or built on, above or under the ground, and includes buildings, walls, bridges, tunnels, car parks and pavements, and other structures like pylons.

The built environment also includes vertical and horizontal features, like walls and roofs, as well as features that might be permanent or relatively temporary in nature. It also covers school grounds, both the hard and soft landscaping within the confines of the school.

The built in environment in Lambeth is important for many wild species and provides a home for 'microhabitats'. Many wild species that would normally have used natural features like caves, cliffs, rocks and bare ground have adapted over the centuries to use artificially created sites like buildings and built features, as natural sites decreased in number and distribution.

Built features differ in look and composition, and include materials like concrete, stone, brick, metal, timber, glass and asphalt. All of these vary in how attractive they are to wildlife, and in how they age. Some become more attractive for wildlife as they deteriorate, season or weather over time. In addition, built features vary in their degree of complexity, as well as orientation, and this offers a huge range of opportunities for habitats to develop, and for different species to colonise the built feature.

The built environment in Lambeth is home to a wide range of plants, birds and mammals, ranging from ferns and flowering plants on buildings and walls, or invertebrates sheltering in wood or brickwork. Many different wild birds use Lambeth's buildings instead of their traditional cliff or rural habitats, or as feeding stations or to monitor and defend territories.

Many mammals use buildings and built features in Lambeth, especially bats, which use them as roosts because houses and commercial premises often have features that provide excellent roosting or nesting places.

B) Where is the best built environment for wildlife in Lambeth?

It is estimated about 80% of the Borough of Lambeth can be classified as 'built environment', which means about 2,180 ha is habitat that is or could be used by many different wild plant and animal species. This makes the built environment the super-dominant habitat in Lambeth, far in excess of any other in the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Much of this built environment habitat is very suitable for wildlife, although much more work is needed to identify which particular areas, buildings or built features are important for wildlife and biodiversity, and what works best in terms of management and design to protect and promote biodiversity.

C) Why do we need an Action Plan for Lambeth's built environment?

The public often has a poor perception of the built environment, and often think buildings and built features are devoid of wildlife, or what is there is not of any value. This creates a risk that built features are not managed to protect or promote wildlife or biodiversity, or are taken down, changed, removed or rebuilt on and that resident wildlife suffers or is lost as a consequence.

Comparatively little is known about the built environment compared with more obvious habitat types, and as a consequence, the requirements of many 'urban' species using built features are poorly understood. This creates a risk that there is inappropriate management of a built feature and as a consequence there is loss of wildlife species, or reductions in their distribution and abundance.

Lack of legal protection for urban wildlife habitat is a major issue. Legal powers protect some species using the built environment, but this is ineffective if their location is unknown, or we can't manage a built feature to provide protection.

Changes to or the loss of built features is a typical and constant process within Lambeth's urban environment. Although many plants and animals characteristic of the built environment are tolerant of disturbance, many others are not. In addition, many sites are occupied by wildlife when human use of a building has finished, but this is often an intermediate stage before demolition of buildings and redevelopment of the site: after this wildlife might be squeezed out by the needs of people.

Lack of integrated site management means many species, particularly birds and mammals, which have habitat needs extending



*St. Mark's School, Vauxhall SE11.
Naturalised planting scheme in and around
school buildings. Lambeth Council 2005*



over numerous landscapes or features within the built environment, will suffer as one site varies from its neighbours in its suitability or quality of wildlife management. Economic factors can make it impractical for landowners to protect habitats within buildings or urban sites, and hence there has to be some form of 'trade-off' between the needs of people and wildlife in any built feature, unfortunately this can be strongly biased towards the needs of humans.



St. Mark's School, Vauxhall SE11. Naturalised planting scheme in and around school buildings. Lambeth Council 2005

Many urban wildlife sites are subject to constant human and mechanical disturbance, including noise and light pollution, and it is difficult to offer wildlife any 'breathing space'. Many forms of wildlife in the built environment are very sensitive to air pollution, especially lichens and higher plants. Another problem is surface water runoff, often contaminated with oil or salt from roads, which affects wild plant species. Former industrial sites, many of which are very important for wildlife, can suffer from contamination which can affect or limit the abundance and health of many wild species. Some invasive alien plant species can be a problem as they displace native species.

D) What is the legal status of Lambeth's built environment?

No building or built structure in Lambeth is currently protected by any statutory or non-statutory wildlife designation. However, a number of wild species which make use of or exploit buildings and built features are protected by current legislation, such as wild birds like the Black Redstart. Bats often roost in buildings and their roosts are fully protected by law. It is illegal to intentionally damage, destroy, or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, or to disturb a bat while it is occupying such a place.

E) What will the Built Environment Action Plan do?

Objective 1. We will determine the importance of buildings and built features in Lambeth as habitat for wild species and promotion of biodiversity. We will undertake an audit of buildings and other built features to identify sites of existing and potential biodiversity value by 2007.

Objective 2. We will raise awareness and appreciation by officers, developers and architects of the importance of buildings and the built environment as habitat for wild species and Lambeth's biodiversity. We will provide advice and guidance on the retention of wildlife features in existing or converted buildings, and inclusion of wildlife-friendly features in new developments (e.g. 'green' or 'brown' roofs), by 2008.

Objective 3. We will promote better management techniques for the promotion and protection of wildlife and biodiversity in buildings and built features in Lambeth. This will include publishing a 'Best Practice for Biodiversity Toolkit' for the management of the built environment and buildings by 2008.

F) Who is involved in the Built Environment Action Plan?

1. Partnerships

The Lead Partner for the Lambeth Built Environment Action Plan is Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces Business Unit (Lambeth Parks). Other Co-Lead Partners are Lambeth Planning, Housing, along with housing association estate managers and contractors.

Other Partners include local landowners and developers, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Greater London Authority, English Heritage, English Nature, London Wildlife Trust and the London Natural History Society.

2. Contact for information

For more information on the Lambeth Built Environment 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 public parks and greenspaces, their management, protection and conservation, can be found on the following websites.

- CABI Space (<http://www.cabespace.org.uk/>)
- London Brownfields Forum – London Biodiversity Partnership (http://www.lbp.org.uk/07library/lwt_brownfield_greenfield.pdf)
- Association of Local Government Ecologists (<http://www.alge.org.uk/>)
- Green Roofs – guidance on green roofs and wildlife value (http://www.english-nature.org.uk/news/news_photo/Greenroofs.pdf)
- English Nature (advice on management plans) (<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/>)
- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (<http://www.btcv.org/>)
- RSPB (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/>)
- London Wildlife Trust (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/>)
- Greater London Authority (<http://www.london.gov.uk/londonissues/>)

