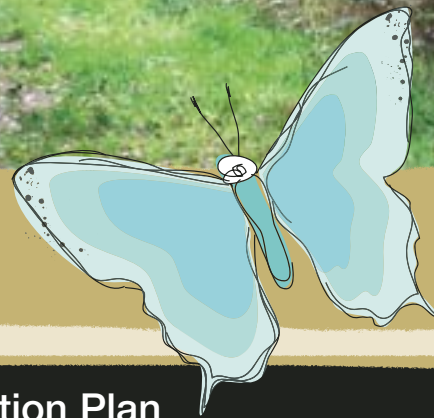




# Acid Grassland



## Aims of the Acid Grassland Action Plan

- To protect existing acid grassland sites within Lambeth for the benefit of biodiversity and for both current and future generations of local people.
- To increase the quality and biodiversity of Lambeth's acid grasslands.
- To increase significantly the area of appropriately managed acid grassland in Lambeth.

### A) Why is acid grassland important?

Acid grassland develops over acidic soils originating from sands and gravels that are freely draining and low in nutrients, not only those important for plants but which also maintain an alkaline or neutral pH in the soils. There are a number of locations in Lambeth where the surface geology is dominated by sands and gravels, and where soils are 'acidic' as a result.

Acid grassland habitat usually consists of various fine-leaved grasses and wildflowers which are able to tolerate and thrive in these acid, low nutrient conditions, such as common bent, red and sheep's fescues, wavy hair grass, sheep's sorrel, tormentil and heath bedstraw.

Acid grasslands in London are very important for their insect and spider populations, often colonised by distinctive groups of such invertebrates. This is due not just to the specific grass and nectar-rich flower species present, but also the loose and often bare soils, plus the dry and sun-exposed locations that acid grasslands are found in.

Prominent invertebrate species in acid grasslands include hole-nesting bees, wasps, many species of butterfly and moth, meadow ants, and birds such as meadow pipit, skylark and green woodpecker. The UK distribution of these species is restricted, and this unique assemblage, along with their association with acid grasslands, is termed the 'Thames Terrace Invertebrate Fauna'.

### B) Is there any acid grassland in Lambeth?

There is approximately 6 hectares of acid grassland in Lambeth, which is about 0.22 % of the total land area of the Borough. The three main sites are at Eardley Road Sidings (TQ 292 703), Peabody Hill (TQ 320 736) and Streatham Common (TQ 307 709).

## **C) Why do we need an Action Plan for acid grassland?**

Out of sight out of mind. All three of Lambeth's main acid grassland sites are in areas where there is a tendency to 'forget they are there' or they need special management. Such sites could suffer from amenity or low-cost open space management, which reduces the acid grassland coverage or affects biodiversity. They can also get neglected and so the habitat suffers from succession by more vigorous habitats like scrub or woodland.

Habitat fragmentation. All three major acid grassland sites in Lambeth are physically isolated from each other, with no 'green connections' between them, which restricts the opportunity for plants and invertebrates to move between sites.

Lack of appropriate management. To be retained, acid grassland needs to be carefully managed. Low-intensity grazing by livestock is a preferred method, but the fragmented nature of sites in Lambeth prevents farmers placing animals on or moving them between site. The average site size is not large enough to support viable flock or herd sizes. Availability of suitable stock or local farms, and disturbance of livestock by the public or their dogs in such urban settings, is also prohibitive.

In the absence of grazing, mowing is the main means of maintaining the open character of acid grassland, but this is far from ideal as it can destroy features important for supporting diverse invertebrate communities, like anthills and tussocky grasses or scrub plants. It is also nowhere as selective as grazing, as it cuts back many plants which may be important refugia or feeding resources for invertebrates and birds.

Amenity use. Acid grasslands in Lambeth are found in or close to existing open spaces or dense residential settlements, with heavy pressure on site managers or contractors to avoid complicated management regimes. Acid grassland can be lost through inappropriate management which benefits more formal recreational areas but not acid grassland or plants and animals which depend upon it.

Dumping and vandalism. All acid grassland sites in Lambeth are targets for illegal dumping of wastes. Flytipped waste smothers ground cover, introduces pollutants or invasive weeds, attracts vermin and discourages public use. Fires, started accidentally or deliberately, are a major hazard and damage habitat or kill animal species, and site managers often address the problem by cutting grass low and frequently, which also affects habitat quality or species diversity.

Dumping of garden or horticultural waste can introduce invasive or alien plants like Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Sycamore and Buddleja, which dominate grassland and out-compete traditional species, so affecting species richness and biodiversity value.

## **D) What is the legal status of acid grassland?**

Lambeth's three main acid grassland sites are not only protected through inclusion in the Lambeth Unitary Development Plan (UDP) but also through notification as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) for the Borough.

Streatham Common is also a Metropolitan Common and so the acid grassland is protected under legislation which confers protection for the whole of the Common. Eardley Road Sidings is a proposed Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and will be protected under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1947.

## E) What will the Acid Grassland Action Plan do?

**Objective 1.** We will raise the profile of acid grassland within Lambeth, and widen and strengthen appreciation by landowners and the public of its ecological value. A series of public events and promotional activities will be used to promote acid grassland by 2008.

**Objective 2.** We will secure appropriate management of all major acid grassland sites in the Borough of Lambeth by 2008.

**Objective 3.** We will conserve important species of acid grassland within Lambeth, with a strong emphasis on invertebrates, through better understanding of their ecology and habitat management requirements. A Borough-wide conservation programme for invertebrate fauna found in acid grassland sites will be instituted by 2008.

## F) Who is involved in the Acid Grassland Action Plan?

### 1. Partnerships

The Lead Partner for the Lambeth Acid Grassland Action Plan is Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces Business Unit (Lambeth Parks). Other Co-Lead Partners would be the Peabody Trust and Lambeth Planning, along with the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contractor.

The Lead Community Partner would be local members of the London Wildlife Trust, and/or the Lambeth Parks and Greenspaces Forum (LPGF).

Other Partners include the Greater London Authority, London Natural History Society, Network Rail, English Nature and the RSPB.

### 2. Contact for information

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

**Dr Iain Boulton, Environmental Education Officer**

Lambeth Parks & Greenspaces

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**Tel:** 020 7926 6209; **Fax:** 020 7926 6201; **email:** [iboulton@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:iboulton@lambeth.gov.uk)

### 3. Further information and advice

Further advice on acid grassland, its ecology, conservation and protection, can be found on the following websites.

- Royal Entomological Society (<http://www.royensoc.co.uk/>)
- British Grassland Society (<http://www.i-way.co.uk/~bgs/>)
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/>)
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/>)
- DEFRA (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/>)
- English Nature (advice on management plans) (<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/>)
- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (<http://www.btcv.org/>)
- London Wildlife Trust (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/>)
- Greater London Authority (<http://www.london.gov.uk/londonissues/>)