

Woodlands



Aims of the Woodlands Action Plan

- To protect existing woodland sites within Lambeth for the benefit of biodiversity and current and future generations of local people.
- To increase the quality and biodiversity of Lambeth's woodlands.
- To increase significantly the area of woodland in Lambeth, particularly in those parts of the Borough where there is a deficiency of or little accessible woodland.

A) Why are woodlands important for Lambeth's biodiversity?

Lambeth contains a network of woodlands that afford residents a retreat from the pressures of living in an urban environment. Woodland provides a valuable resource for public enjoyment and the quality of life; it is used for walking, playing, recreation, education and exercise.

Lambeth's woodlands are important for their heritage value, and often have a rich cultural, historical and landscape history associated with them, or the people who owned, managed or lived in them. Woodland in Lambeth also has 'structure' – it varies both with height and across the ground it covers, and this is important in terms of biodiversity; the more variation in the woodland structure, the greater the biodiversity tends to be.

Woodland is arguably one of the UK's richest wildlife habitats, yet it is extremely vulnerable to both losses of actual habitat and changes in management, both of which have drastic impacts on its species richness. Over 40 UK woodland species have died out over the last 100 years, and a further 140 woodland species have declined in both numbers and distribution that they are now described in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan as 'requiring urgent action' to save them.

B) Are there woodlands in Lambeth?

There are approximately 17 ha of identified woodland sites in Lambeth, which amounts to about 0.62 % of the total land area of the Borough. Most woodland cover in Lambeth is found in Streatham and Norwood, and there is a clear deficiency of woodland cover in the northern half of the Borough. The main woodland sites in Lambeth are at Eardley Road Sidings, Knight's Hill Wood, Palace Road Gardens, Peabody Hill, Streatham Common and Unigate Wood.

Virtually all of the woodland found in Lambeth is believed to be 'secondary woodland': if any primary woodland remains it is almost impossible to prove through an absence of historical records. All of the woodland sites in Lambeth developed on sites which were cleared of primary woodland centuries ago and used for other purposes. The woodland developed naturally following abandonment or was encouraged through tree plantings plus a relaxed management style.

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

All woodland sites in Lambeth are physically isolated from each other, with no strong 'green connections' between them. This 'habitat fragmentation' restricts the opportunity for woodland plants and animals to move between sites, so sustaining existing or enriching species diversity.

Most woodland in Lambeth has suffered, for various reasons, from poor or inappropriate management. Although all the woodlands are included in a number of grounds maintenance contracts, these are not designed to maintain woodland biodiversity.

Woodlands have become popular for amenity use, such as horse riding, cycling, jogging, dog walking, and cross-country running. However, excessive use for these activities or by activities which are unacceptable like motorcycling, can affect woodland biodiversity by disturbing animals, causing erosion or compaction of fragile soils, or causing internal habitat fragmentation.

Many woodlands in Lambeth are targets for vandalism or illegal dumping of household, industrial or building wastes. Flytipped waste smothers valuable woodland ground cover, introduces pollutants or invasive weeds, attracts vermin and discourages public use as the site becomes unsightly.

Dumping of garden or horticultural waste frequently introduces invasive or alien plants like Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Sycamore, Rhododendron, Cherry Laurel or Buddleja. All these plants can come to dominate indigenous woodland species or shade out ground flora, so affecting the species richness and distribution of the woodland, and reducing its biodiversity value.



White-letter hairstreak (Satyrium w-album).
Copyright: Ian Beames/ardea.com



Animal damage is a growing threat. Grey squirrels strip bark of many tree species causing stunting and sometimes tree death; rabbits and deer can also damage trees and ground flora.

Dutch elm disease has caused structural and species changes in woodlands containing elm trees. Other pests and diseases such as alder or oak dieback, and sudden oak death syndrome, may be serious problems in the future, along with the Asian longhorn beetle pest.

Substantial areas of Lambeth once covered by woodland have been lost to development, such as housing or roads. This has increased the degree of woodland habitat fragmentation and affected biodiversity. All remaining woodlands in Lambeth are in prime development areas of the Borough.



Streatham Common SW16: woodland area off Covington Way, showing standing dead wood and dense scrub habitat. Lambeth Council 2005

D) What is the legal status of Lambeth's woodland sites?

All of Lambeth's woodland sites are protected in the Lambeth Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which recognises them as important open spaces and protects them from development. All publicly owned woodland sites in Lambeth are covered by legislation which prevents the felling or maltreatment of amenity trees – Tree Preservation Orders. Trees in tended areas not growing wild are protected from vandalism by the Criminal Damage Act 1971; trees growing wild are also covered by this Act except in respect of foliage and fruit.

E) What will the Woodlands Action Plan do?

Objective 1. We will increase the public understanding of, and community involvement in, Lambeth's woodlands, and propose a 50% increase in use of the Borough's woodlands for access, education and community projects by 2010.

Objective 2. We will increase the biodiversity of existing and proposed woodland in Lambeth. Each of Lambeth's woodlands will be under or included in a site conservation management plan, which identifies actions to retain and increase biodiversity value, by 2008.

Objective 3. We will protect all existing woodland, and increase woodland cover by 5% within Lambeth by 2012.

F) Who is involved in the Woodlands Action Plan?

1. Partnerships

The Lead Partner for the Lambeth Woodlands Action Plan is Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces Business Unit (Lambeth Parks). Other Co-Lead Partners include the Peabody Trust, Lambeth Planning and the Council's Grounds and Tree Maintenance Contractors.

The Lead Community Partner would be the Lambeth Parks and Greenspaces Forum (LPGF), representing greenspace user groups with an interest in woodland management and biodiversity. Other Partners include the London Tree Officers Association, the Greater London Authority, London Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the London Natural History Society.

2. Contact for information

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

Dr Iain Boulton, Environmental Education Officer

Lambeth Parks & Greenspaces

4th Floor Blue Star House, 234-244 Stockwell Road, London SW9 9SP

Tel: 020 7926 6209; **Fax:** 020 7926 6201; **email:** iboulton@lambeth.gov.uk

3. Further information and advice

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

- The Tree Council (<http://www.treecouncil.org.uk/>)
- The Woodland Trust (<http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/>)
- Forestry Commission (<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/>)
- London Wildlife Trust (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/>)



Streatham Common SW16: woodland area at top of Common, showing view through oak and beech tree cover in Autumn. Lambeth Council 2005