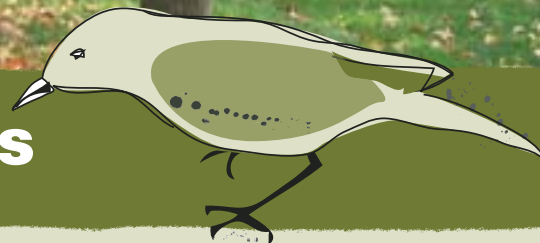




Parks & Greenspaces



Aims of the Parks and Greenspaces Action Plan

- To encourage good nature conservation practice in Lambeth's parks and greenspaces, to encourage a greater diversity of wildlife habitat and abundance of wild plants and animals.
- To raise awareness in people, schools and businesses of the importance of Lambeth's parks and greenspaces in terms of the biodiversity of both the Borough and London.
- To encourage a greater involvement by residents in their local parks and greenspaces for a wider range of positive uses, including landscape and nature conservation.

A) Why are parks and greenspaces important for biodiversity?

Parks and open spaces provide opportunities for relaxation, recreation, and play and to observe and enjoy landscape and wildlife. They act as 'green lungs' for people living in urban centres whom for whatever reasons cannot live in or visit the wider countryside.

Parks and greenspaces are also important in providing an 'environmental' element in the quality of people's lives, giving immediate access to wildlife and a sense of environmental responsibility and interest in nature conservation.

London is internationally acclaimed for its parks, yet this enormous resource is not normally managed or designated to promote wildlife: the general perception is that parks and greenspaces are there for access, recreation and leisure, and nature conservation takes second place. This is an attitude changing in many quarters, as more people recognise the significant biodiversity status of a local park.

As development extends into the countryside surrounding London, especially into the 'Green Belt', people increasingly recognise the importance of London's parks and greenspaces as a haven for wildlife, and as a vital component of the City's biodiversity status.

B) Where are the parks and greenspaces in Lambeth?

Lambeth has 64 officially designated 'parks and public greenspaces' which are managed by Lambeth Parks and Greenspaces Unit. These sites make up about 270 ha of the total land area for Lambeth which amounts to about 9.9% of the area of the Borough. There are also a number of small sites which, although privately owned, are managed as parks for the public to use and enjoy.



Streatham Common SW16: The Rookery, showing dense ivy and other climbing vegetation on old walls – an important invertebrate habitat and bird-feeding feature. Lambeth Council 2005

C) Why do we need an Action Plan for Lambeth’s parks and greenspaces?

Natural areas of woodland and scrub in parks and greenspaces have a poor public perception with concerns over personal security, especially for women and lone people. Long grass suggests neglect, poor management or an ‘uncared for’ attitude. People complain that long grass or scrub areas accumulate litter and hide dog or hazardous wastes, so the pressure to remove the perceived problem can obliterate or damage many natural areas.

Parks and greenspaces across the UK are subject to severe financial constraints, particularly following Compulsory Competitive Tendering and Best Value, which had impacts on the creation and management of ecological areas within open spaces. For instance, cost cutting on staffing reduces flexibility to undertake resource-hungry nature conservation works.

Contract specifications often create problems in defining how a park or open space can be managed to benefit both the needs of wildlife and demands for tidiness, cleanliness and safety. Tight timescales for modern grounds maintenance contracts is a problem for activities that benefit nature conservation, with inflexibility in permitting ‘fine tweaking’ as new wildlife habitats evolve or extend, or alter sequences of management regimes to accommodate the needs of nature.

There is a need for staff training in the ecological management of parks and greenspaces, including assessing the impacts of traditional gardening methods on habitat creation and management. A high staff turnover in local authorities and contractors exacerbates the problem as skilled individuals leave and fail to pass on accumulated knowledge and experience to new staff.

Many parks and greenspaces suffer frequent attacks from vandalism and dumping, which can impact upon wildlife areas, such as deliberate arson of meadow grassland. This can make site owners, managers and users naturally reluctant to entertain such risk areas, and revert to short mown amenity grassland for safety and cost reasons.

Dumping or disposal of garden or horticultural waste can introduce invasive or alien plants, like Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed, Sycamore, Rhododendron, Cherry Laurel or Buddleja, to parks and greenspaces. These dominate indigenous wild plant species or shade out the normal ground flora, so affecting species richness and distribution in the open space.

Many grounds maintenance contracts rely on the use of pesticides to control or eradicate plant and animals pests – and there is concern about the indiscriminate use of pesticides upon natural ecosystems. Local authorities and site managers are under pressure to find alternatives when it comes to public parks and greenspaces, especially where effects upon humans are also a concern.

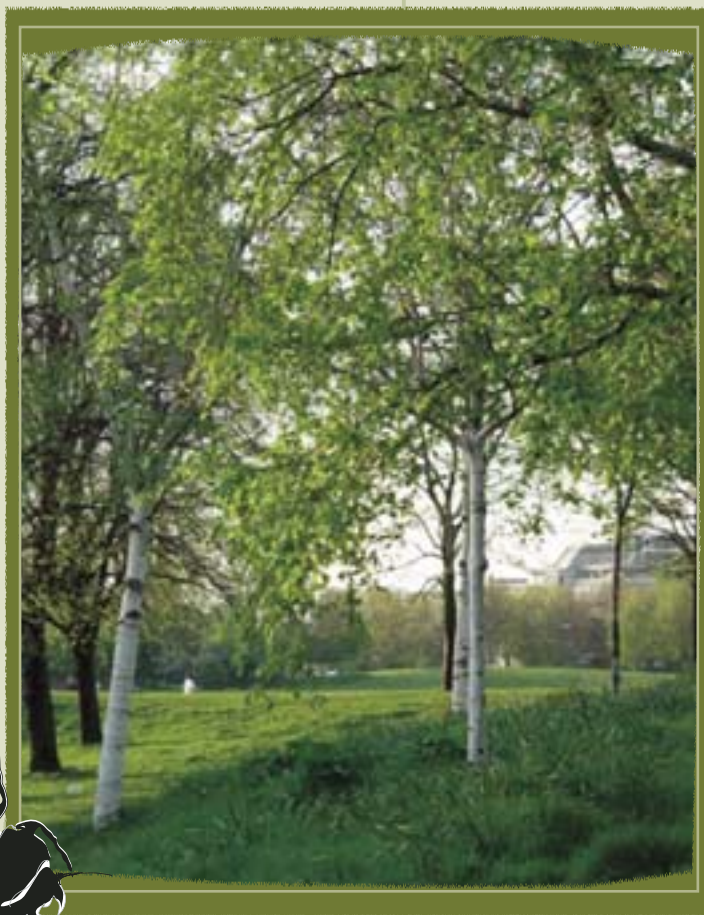
Damage by animals, including dogs, is a major public health issue, and there is evidence it can affect wild flora through effects on soil chemistry and nutrient levels. Other wild animals can cause damage if not managed, e.g. bark stripping of young trees by grey squirrels, muntjac deer and voles.

D) What is the legal status of Lambeth's parks and greenspaces?

All 64 parks and greenspaces managed by Lambeth Parks are protected from development or loss by inclusion in the Lambeth Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which also recognises the importance of parks and greenspaces for nature conservation and biodiversity.

Many of the larger parks are designated Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) or Urban Open Space, and a number of public gardens and squares in Lambeth are listed in English Heritage's register of historic landscapes.

Many of Lambeth's parks and greenspaces are also within Conservation Areas, and this confers protection from inappropriate developments, both surrounding and within the open space, some of which could adversely affect their landscape and nature conservation value.



Larkhall Park SW8: view into park, showing marginal woodland and rough grassland, with birch trees and bulbs in undercanopy. Lambeth Council 2005.



E) What will the Parks and Greenspaces Action Plan do?

Objective 1. We will improve knowledge and understanding of the nature conservation interest and biodiversity value of Lambeth's parks and greenspaces. A Borough-wide audit of parks and greenspaces to identify areas of existing biodiversity value, and areas with potential for improvement to increase biodiversity value through appropriate management will be undertaken by 2008.

Objective 2. We will promote good management for nature conservation in Lambeth's parks and greenspaces, publishing a 'Best Practice Guide' for greenspace biodiversity by 2008.

Objective 3. We will improve public and user group awareness of wildlife in, and the biodiversity importance of, Lambeth's parks and greenspaces. A programme of talks, walks and training will be delivered to Members, key officers, schools, community and park user groups by 2008

F) Who is involved in the Parks and Greenspaces Action Plan?

1. Partnerships

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

The Lead Community Partner would be the Lambeth Parks and Greenspaces Forum (LPGF), which is the 'umbrella' body for the Borough's various Parks Friends and other user groups. Other Partners include the Metropolitan Parks and Gardens Association, 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 Parks and Greenspaces 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 public parks and greenspaces, their management, protection and conservation, can be found on the following websites.

- CABI Space (<http://www.cabespace.org.uk/>)
- ILAM (<http://www.ilam.co.uk/>)
- Association of Local Government Ecologists (<http://www.alge.org.uk/>)
- Greenspace (Urban Parks Forum) (<http://www.green-space.org.uk/>)
- DEFRA (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/index.htm>)
- 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/>)