

# Policy Statement

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## GARDENS

Almost a quarter of London is made up of gardens, which represent an important resource for the Capital's wildlife. Gardens can provide vital habitats for wildlife and a strong network of wildlife and climate friendly gardens stretching across the Capital will provide room for species to move freely and adapt to our changing climate. They can help reduce the impacts of climate change and help to cool the city (especially in parts of London which have few other greenspaces). Gardens also provide health and recreation benefits to people.

Gardens are threatened by a number of pressures including development - new targets for housing, reflecting social, economic and demographic changes have fuelled the demand for suburban infill or backland development. This has resulted in significant loss of garden habitat in some areas. However, inappropriate garden design and/or management appears to be highly significant over the past 10 years; many gardens – front and back - have been paved over or decked resulting in high levels of habitat loss. If this trend continues, then the impacts on wildlife and our ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change could be dramatic. Other pressures affecting garden habitats and wildlife include climate change, pesticide use, and indirect pollution.

Private gardens form an important part of London's landscape, and for many people these are the places where they have most frequent contact with nature. Londoners can have a significant impact on the extent and quality of the capital's gardens, therefore London Wildlife Trust aims to strengthen and develop its work on gardens to secure the future of London's gardens for the benefit of people and wildlife.

### **I. Policy**

#### **Overall value**

- London Wildlife Trust values the role that gardens can play as part of London's network of green spaces: in supporting biodiversity; as refuges for some important species; and as places for people to experience nature on their doorstep;
- The Trust recognises that a number of gardens can be highly valuable for wildlife, with some in London containing populations of regionally or nationally important species, and/or often unique communities of wildlife;
- The Trust will work to maintain (and enhance where possible) the extent and value of London's gardens for the benefit of people and wildlife;
- The Trust has identified London's Gardens as a priority 'Living Landscape' scheme and will work with a wide range of partners to develop and implement a shared vision for London's gardens.

#### **Design and management**

- The Trust will promote best practice in wildlife and climate-friendly garden design and management through its sites (e.g. the Centre for Wildlife Gardening in Peckham), events (e.g. Hampton Court show gardens), activities, campaigns and materials;

- The Trust will support landscaping or other environmental improvements to gardens where these will promote or enhance the existing biodiversity interest of a site (but not support 'improvements' to gardens where this will damage or result in a loss of features of biodiversity interest);
- The Trust supports design and management that seeks to enhance gardens for biodiversity and climate change adaptation (whilst recognising that not all gardens have high value or potential value for biodiversity);
- The Trust supports the use of garden plants that are beneficial to local wildlife; these may be either 'native' British plants or 'non-native' plants, but the use of some native plants will usually be recommended;
- The use of invasive plants in gardens will be strongly discouraged, except where such plants are beneficial to wildlife and can be easily controlled or restricted.

### ***Protection and planning***

- The Trust strongly believes that the ecological and amenity values of garden sites should be taken into account prior to development decisions;
- The Trust advocates that the ecological and amenity value of London's gardens be accounted for in Local Development Frameworks, local BAPs, climate change strategies, and other relevant planning guidance;
- The Trust supported the decision to remove gardens from the 'brownfield land' category in order to reduce the threat of inappropriate development on garden land (however, we recognise that some brownfield sites have high biodiversity value, and will work to protect and enhance such sites where appropriate);
- The Trust supports the Mayor of London's application of the national requirement for planning permission to install impermeable surfaces in front gardens (thereby encouraging people to use permeable surfaces in order to help reduce the impacts of climate change).

### ***Promotion***

- The Trust will work with members of the public, the Mayor, development agencies, local authorities, developers, community organisations and other stakeholders to promote the value of London's gardens;
- The Trust will continue to run a high profile wildlife gardening campaign in order to inform and engage Londoners to enhance the value of London's gardens for wildlife and climate change;
- The Trust will promote the use of peat alternatives in gardens, in line with RSWT's guidelines on the use of peat-based products;
- The Trust will promote the use of organic and sustainable gardening methods wherever possible;
- The Trust will encourage gardeners to work with their neighbours to create garden 'wildlife corridors' and 'stepping stones', and to share expertise and resources;
- The Trust will promote awareness of water as a valuable garden resource through advocating rainwater collection, reuse of grey water where possible, sympathetic planting, use of permeable surfaces (e.g. living roofs), and minimising mains water usage in the garden.

### ***Advice***

- The Trust will provide high quality advice on wildlife and climate friendly gardening at its staffed sites and events, through project and contract work, and via Trust literature (e.g. the website, garden campaign materials);

- The Trust will actively discourage collection of wild plants for the purpose of translocation to gardens, and will also actively discourage gardeners from translocating garden plants into the wild e.g. Spanish bluebell (we will help to enforce national legislation on this where appropriate);
- The Trust will encourage gardeners to seek permission from landowners before collecting wild seed for the purpose of garden propagation.

The Trust will review this policy and amend it following any changes to legislation or planning guidance, as appropriate.

## 2. Context

### Definitions

Gardens are here defined as the private open spaces surrounding residential dwellings. These include those areas where the householders have either sole responsibility for garden management, or are able to exert significant influence on such management (as is the case with many property management companies or residents' associations). There are over three million gardens in Greater London covering an area of almost 38,000 hectares (source: GiGL, 2009).

Gardens were declassified as brownfield land in June 2010.<sup>1</sup> This is likely to reduce (but not halt) garden loss through in-fill developments, giving local authorities more power to refuse planning applications.

### History

The rapid growth of suburban London in the last century, when combined with existing areas of Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian suburbs, resulted in large areas of low-density housing enclosing groups of individual gardens. Together these groups of gardens add up to substantial areas of open land. The mosaic of gardens across the capital acts as an 'urban nature reserve', and is widely recognised as providing valuable habitat for a significant number of species.

There are over 3.2 million garden plots in London, covering almost 38,000 hectares.

Private gardens form an important part of London's landscape. For many people these are the places where they have most frequent contact with nature. They are very varied areas of greenspace, ranging in size from tiny 'pocket handkerchiefs' in central London, to larger suburban gardens, shared community gardens attached to blocks of flats, and the elaborate landscaped parkland of London's grander mansions. Although gardens generally increase in size the further they are from central London, modern gardens tend to be much smaller – many new developments are built without gardens.

### Biodiversity and climate change

Gardens are probably the most varied areas of greenspace in London. They can provide a rich variety of wildlife habitats such as mature trees, hedges, shrubberies, meadow areas, deadwood, buildings, and ponds. Garden ponds support amphibians, dragonflies and other wildlife. Dense undergrowth provides good breeding sites for small birds and mammals, many of which have suffered significant declines in the countryside. Hedgehogs, bats, butterflies, stag beetles and other invertebrates are frequently associated with this habitat. Larger gardens, and gardens adjoining areas of semi-natural habitat, may help to support populations of grass snakes, badgers, foxes and many birds (such as woodpeckers). Many national Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species are associated with gardens, for example house sparrow and common toad.

Gardens provide shade, absorb carbon, soak up flood water, retain water and help to cool the city. They also provide vital habitats for wildlife. A strong network of wildlife and climate friendly gardens stretching across the capital will provide room for species to move freely and adapt to our changing climate.

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<sup>1</sup> **Brownfield** land is that which has been **previously developed**; in contrast, **greenfield** land has never been built on. In London, brownfield land can cover everything from derelict car-parks and wasteland to grassland and semi-mature woodland, given the history of the city.

### Threats

Threats to garden habitats and wildlife are diverse and include garden loss through backland and in-fill development, paving over of front gardens, decking and simplification of rear gardens, inappropriate planting (e.g. introduction of invasive plant species), climate change, and management that is detrimental to wildlife (e.g. use of pesticides).

In 2011 the Trust published research carried out in partnership with Greenspace Information for Greater London and the Greater London Authority, which showed that by far the greatest impact on gardens between 1998-2008 was the loss of greenery through garden design and management. About 3000 ha of greenspace (equivalent to 2.5 times the size of Hyde Park) disappeared annually during this period. This exceeded that lost to development (about 6 ha annually).

### Protection

There is very little legislative protection given to gardens. As undeveloped land has become scarcer in the city, gardens are under increasing pressure for development. Changing fashions and the transient nature of urban living provide additional pressures as gardens can be changed as frequently as their ownership, causing at times locally significant disruption to their ecology and habitats.

New guidance introduced during 2010, removing gardens from the brownfield land classification, offers some protection from backland development pressure. As brownfield land gardens were vulnerable to loss from in-fill development with implications for the protection and conservation of wildlife.

However, gardens are perhaps now at great risk from changes that occur under the 'planning radar'. Either construction that can be defined as permitted development, such as conservatories, sheds and other structures, or simply the removal of vegetation and installation of decking and paving.

PPS9 (*Biodiversity and Geological Conservation*) recognises that gardens can have significant biodiversity interest, and the aim is to retain this interest into any development of a site. PPG17 is also directly relevant.

A number of legally protected and priority Biodiversity Action Plan species can be found in gardens in London, including slow-worm, great crested newt, hedgehog, house sparrow, and common toad. These will be subject to the application of, in particular, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Countryside & Rights of Way Act (2000), in respect of activities that may affect their presence on any site.

### Taking action

In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the role that many gardens can play in supporting biodiversity, and their value for climate change adaptation. The widespread consensus that development should take account of biodiversity is now being reflected in the increasing amount of guidance aimed at developers and planners (who are also encouraged to promote green roofs, green facades and other green features). More importantly, garden owners are showing ever-increasing interest in adopting management practices to encourage wildlife into their gardens, as reflected in the gardening media and the rising sales of wildflower seeds and bird-feeders.

Campaigns such as LWT's 'Garden for a Living London' and the BBC's 'Breathing Spaces' promote gardening for wildlife and climate change. The joint LWT and GIGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London) Garden Research Project is mapping garden habitat distribution and composition across London for government and other relevant organisations. Collating data on garden distribution, loss, and the range of habitat features will create a framework for statistical analysis and future protection, and will help to shape and strengthen LWT's gardening campaign.

The London Biodiversity Partnership's Private Gardens Habitat Action Plan Group works to promote the immense value of gardens to wildlife both to London's gardeners and to legislators. Demonstration sites and information centres across the capital such as those at LWT's Centre for Wildlife Gardening, Camley Street Nature Reserve, and the Chelsea Physic Garden, and the Museum of Garden History, demonstrate the techniques and skills required to garden for wildlife.

### 3. Related Policies, Strategies and Action Plans

#### London:

The London Climate Change Adaptation Strategy – <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/publications/2008/docs/climate-change-adapt-strat.pdf>

London Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning guidance – see <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/docs/spg-sustainable-design.pdf>

London Biodiversity Action Plan: London Private Gardens Habitat Action Plan (HAP)

London Biodiversity Action Plan: various species and habitat action plans

See [www.lbp.org.uk](http://www.lbp.org.uk) for further information on all London HAPs and SAPs.

Some London boroughs may have their own BAPs which identify gardens and/or species commonly found in gardens as local BAP priorities.

#### National:

Legislation requiring householders to get planning permission to pave over their front gardens using impermeable surfaces – see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/pavingfrontgardens.pdf>

Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing – see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/statements/corporate/planning-policy-statement3>

Invasives Non-native Species Framework Strategy – see [www.nonnativespecies.org](http://www.nonnativespecies.org)

### 4. References

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Thompson, K (2006), *No Nettles Required*, Eden Project Books

Vickery, M (1998), *Gardening for Butterflies*, The British Butterfly Conservation Society Ltd.

## 5. Links

BBC Breathing Spaces - [www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces](http://www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces)

Green Space Information for Greater London - [www.gigl.org.uk/](http://www.gigl.org.uk/)

London Biodiversity Partnership; London Private Gardens Habitat Action Plan [www.lbp.org.uk](http://www.lbp.org.uk)

London Wildlife Trust – Garden for a Living London campaign  
[www.wildlondon.org.uk/Campaigns/GardenforaLivingLondon/tabid/162/Default.aspx](http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/Campaigns/GardenforaLivingLondon/tabid/162/Default.aspx)

Sunshine Garden - <http://www.london.gov.uk/sunshinegarden/>

UK Biodiversity Action Plan - [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk)