

# LONDON'S LIVING LANDSCAPES

*A recovery plan for nature*



Protecting London's  
wildlife for the future



## Acknowledgements

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**Front cover:** view across to Wembley from Addington Hills, Croydon

**Back cover:** adder, lesser spotted woodpecker, wood mouse, common green shield bug nymph, fun in the trees, Totteridge Fields

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### London Wildlife Trust

is the only charity dedicated solely to protecting the capital's wildlife and wild spaces, engaging London's diverse communities through access to our nature reserves, campaigning, volunteering and education.

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*Top left to right: brown long-eared bat; rosebay willowherb; River Thames; water vole; blue tit; Dryad's saddle. Above: bluebells at Perivale Wood*

# Living Landscapes – a recovery plan for nature in London



**London's Living Landscapes initiative seeks to protect, conserve and enhance the Capital's wildlife. London Wildlife Trust wants to connect fragmented natural green and blue spaces to form vibrant landscapes and to work in partnership with London's diverse communities to enjoy and help their natural environment.**

London is remarkably green but it is definitely becoming ever greyer

London needs a new powerful vision to protect and conserve the city's nature in the face of economic growth and social challenges. Whether it's peregrine falcons over the inner city, the historic deer parks of Richmond and Hampton, the wildness of the Thames' grazing marshes out east or the vibrancy of wasteland

flowers and insects, the living landscapes of London are critical. London's natural heritage is as vital as her cultural assets.

Environmental policy has become more fragmented where decisions are taken by a range of different bodies often in isolation from each other and with reduced resources. Few of these have been designed with nature in mind and virtually none allow for nature's restoration. Faced with this vast complexity there is a risk that wildlife's benefits to society – and its own intrinsic worth – are either significantly downplayed or ignored.

The value of the natural environment as a vital ecosystem service which underpins our economy and society is increasingly higher on the political agenda. Sites and species have been identified to protect their scientific interest, and are now being recognised as having other potentially important functions, such as climate control and flood management.

Even so many long-running studies have documented a continuous decline in the quality of Britain's natural environment. The report



*State of Nature* (2013) found 59% of urban species had declined. Several species of bird in London including the house sparrow, mistle thrush and song thrush have exhibited notable declines in recent years. This runs in parallel by an estimated loss of 3,000ha of vegetated land in London's gardens between 1999 and 2008, the equivalent of 2½ Hyde Parks lost every year.

London Wildlife Trust is working with many partners and local communities, urban and rural, to inspire people about the future of their area: their own Living Landscape. We want to help transform the environment we live in: restoring, recreating and reconnecting wildlife-rich spaces.

The aim is a series of Living Landscapes, linked together across the length and breadth of London. They will re-connect the urban and rural areas; the Thames and London's tributary rivers through to the estuary. They will complement and help strengthen a range of other existing landscape initiatives in London, such as the All London Green grid.



We, as part of The Wildlife Trusts nationally, believe it is possible to achieve A Living Landscape across the whole of Britain in 30 years – a single generation – but only if opportunities are seized now.

London is at a pivotal moment; the protection and enhancement of her ecological assets can't be taken for granted. The city is set to grow significantly in an increasingly unstable climate, and this will place profound pressures on London's natural heritage in a way that it will have never experienced before. We have an opportunity to guide society towards a new era in which nature plays a central role. We also have the opportunity for London to lead the world's cities in restoring our natural environment.

We urgently need your help as we enter this new era for nature across the Capital. We aim to support robust, resilient and connected landscapes that help wildlife and people. This is a long-term agenda and we urge you to join us on our journey towards London's Living Landscapes.



# What is a Living Landscape?

Living Landscapes may cover a large area of land. They are naturally functioning landscapes (such as a river catchment) often encompassing many individual wildlife sites. They may also be remnants of former much larger landscapes such as woodlands. Or they may be much more local such as a mosaic of parks, gardens and allotments. In London they are likely to be a network of habitats; semi-natural and artificial.

We will be working with many partners, landowners and local communities to restore the natural landscape through these proposed Living Landscape schemes. They are all pieces of the jigsaw that will combine to form the wider Living Landscape we envisage: a national network of high-quality natural areas for people and wildlife.

## Each Living Landscape consists of:

### Core areas of high quality wildlife habitat

These will usually be designated nature reserves and wildlife sites. These are the vital sanctuaries from which wildlife will be able to expand into the wider landscape once it is restored. The larger these patches are and the more well managed for wildlife, the better.

### Connections between core areas

Continuous corridors of suitable habitat, such as river banks, parks, railway embankments, playing fields, allotments, mosaics of gardens, and hedgerows can act as 'wildlife highways' allowing species to travel across the city as they disperse through the landscape to find suitable living conditions – this is even more important in the face of climate change. More typically in London habitats are connected by a matrix of stepping stones which are smaller, unconnected natural areas, pockets that act as stop-off points for wildlife on the move – for example a series of gardens between parks.

### Permeability across the whole landscape

Buildings and land between the core areas and connecting habitats need to be more accessible to wildlife. This can include street trees and the provision of living walls and roofs. It may not all be pristine habitat but we can change the way it is designed and managed so that it is easier for wildlife to move through and re-colonise the landscape. It is important that we manage the urban environment more sustainably so that we can continue to benefit from the essential ecosystem services provided by the natural environment, such as clean air and water, healthy soils, food production and flood management.

## Before



## After



## The components of ecological networks

Some wildlife species can only thrive in larger core areas whereas others need small but well connected patches. Some prefer lots of edge or boundary habitats as provided by linear corridors. Series of stepping stones add to the mosaic of habitats through urban areas. Whilst connectivity is logically an important aspect of species richness there is some uncertainty that this can be provided by corridors alone. A matrix or a whole landscape approach is needed.

# Why do we need a Living Landscapes approach in London?



## In a Living Landscape

- wildlife is abundant and flourishing, both in London and the surrounding countryside;
- habitats and ecosystems have been restored;
- wildlife is able to move freely through these landscapes and adapt to the effects of climate change;
- people are benefitting fully from the fundamental services that healthy landscapes provide;
- everyone has access to wildlife-rich green spaces and can enjoy and be inspired by the natural world

## In London's Living Landscapes we need to:

- Stop damage and loss to existing habitats and species populations
- Restore damaged and undermanaged habitats
- Recreate habitats, corridors to landscapes
- Reconnect people and landscapes
- Celebrate nature



The conservation of nature in London has traditionally focused on the preservation of specific sites and species. The first recorded statutes date from 1285 to protect fish stocks in the River Thames; laws to prevent the persecution of scavenging birds appeared in the 15th century. Wild animals and plants living in the city were first recorded and mapped in the 16th century leading to the development of local groups such as the London Natural History Society in 1858.

The Open Spaces Act was sponsored by John Lubbock MP who also introduced Bank Holidays giving Londoners time to explore local landscapes. Royal Parks and new landscaped parks were created from the late 1830s to give workers opportunities to relax and take in clean air. The Selborne Society in 1902 created London's first, (and Britain's second) nature reserve at Perivale Wood in Ealing. The Society and the Fin Fur & Feather Folk (in Croydon), led to the birth of the RSPB in 1889.

Landscape scale approaches in London date back to at least the 19th century. As London's population boomed, the idea to establish a 'green girdle' to restrict urban

sprawl around London was developed, and eventually established with the Green Belt. However, positive management was not legally enshrined and there has been an ongoing erosion of wildlife and landscape quality.

As the demand for land for housing, development and agriculture has increased, so the room for wildlife and natural processes has decreased. This has resulted in small oases of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (including 200 nature reserves and wilder parts of parks), becoming surrounded by an often inhospitable urban landscape for many plants and animals. In the face of climate change, we need to link these wildlife rich areas and restore ecosystems and natural processes at a speed and on a scale that we would once have felt was impossible. These large-scale schemes will help to alleviate floods, control pollution and help us cope with extremes of temperature.

## London's Living Landscapes makes 'here' here

Landscape is about the relationship between nature people, and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day living. The term does not just mean specially designated landscapes and it applies to London as well as its countryside. Landscapes can include urban parks, river valleys, railway lines, gardens, buildings and brownfields.

Shopping centres, fast food chains and car parks are often cited as examples of placeless landscape elements. However nature

contributes to the identity and pride of our local place in London. This needs to be more highly valued, often being attractive and accessible to people; full of wildlife and enhancing our quality of life; and rich in opportunities for learning, working, health and wellbeing.

London's Living Landscapes makes 'here' here.

The National Planning Policy Framework establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) were outlined in the Government's Natural Environment White Paper (2011). The Mayor's London Plan gives a degree of planning protection to some strategic wildlife sites, and embeds targets for habitat restoration and creation, together with commitments towards urban greening through the All London Green Grid.

The Wildlife Trusts and the Town & Country Planning Association have published '*Planning for a healthy environment*' as a resource to provide planning guidance on green infrastructure for biodiversity. It is directed at local authority planners to 'bridge the gap' between high level NPPF and more detailed 'how to' best practice.

London Wildlife Trust (and many partners) has long recognised that nature's decline undermines our society's desire for prosperity and a high standard of wellbeing into the future. Our vision to create Living Landscapes is essentially a mission to bring about nature's recovery – to rebuild our natural capital for the benefit of all.

*Top left: North Downs on the edge of London  
Top right: back gardens in Selsdon, Croydon*



#### **Jay**

Known as shy woodland birds, jays are increasingly seen using gardens as part of London's urban forest and help with the regeneration of oak



#### **Bee**

Bees can fly 3km depending on the availability of flowers. More research is needed to find out how they are affected by urban landscapes



#### **European eel**

The larvae of European eels travel 6,000km from the Sargasso Sea to the Thames, and then return to the ocean as adults to spawn



#### **Newt**

Newts can travel across grassland and wasteland up to 500 metres from their breeding ponds, but not across significant barriers such as roads



#### **Hedgehog**

Although they can climb and swim well hedgehogs need gaps left in fences and can roam 2km in a night but are too often killed on roads

## Features of Living Landscapes

A network of natural greenspaces - both wild and those designed and managed with wildlife in mind - offers London sustainable solutions to challenges such as flood management, climate change, wildlife conservation and pollution control.

### **Rivers**

Rivers are important linear features providing connectivity for wildlife and people. Those that are allowed to flow more naturally (outside of culverts and tunnels) can help the city adapt to climate change, reduce flooding, and provide valuable wildlife refuges and amenity benefits.

### **Ponds**

Ponds and other wetlands can support an immense variety of plants and animals, and are often attractive features for people to enjoy, and can play a role in urban water management. For example, reedbeds can help cleanse dirty water.

### **Gardens**

Gardens form almost a quarter of London, and collectively their mosaics of lawns, shrubberies, trees and wild patches provide stepping stones for wildlife and a significant means to adapt the city to climate change.

### **Communal gardens**

Allotments, housing estate landscapes, and other gardens also provide an under-appreciated contribution to London's landscapes. By enhancing them for wildlife – such as with pollinating plants and wild patches for birds and butterflies – strengthens their value to the city.

### **Balcony garden**

This is where you can relax, take in the views and yet be surrounded by vegetables, climbing plants and flowers. Even in the smallest patches, a little bit of greenery all adds to the greater whole.

### **Green roofs and walls**

Green roofs and walls are vegetated to varying degrees, providing habitats for insects and birds, and can help to cool buildings in hot weather, and capture rainwater to help prevent flooding.

### **Green walking and cycling routes**

A place to hear the birds sing, watch the ducks dabbling, a route to work, school and the shops, a short stroll in your lunch hour, or an energetic ride to make you feel more alive - much better when surrounded by wildlife than concrete.

### **Wildflower meadows**

Traditional parks need high levels of resources and money; more self-sustaining and cost-effective methods by allowing wildflowers and grasses to flourish work with the grain of nature, provide a pollinating resource, and add to the local ecological distinctiveness.

### **Urban forest**

The network of street, garden and railside trees linked with parks and woodlands form the urban forest. Collectively they help to reduce air pollution, reduce flash flooding, improve mental health, give shade to help avoid heat stroke and skin cancer, and reduce wind speeds.

**Animals use different sized landscapes**



# LONDON'S LIVINGLANDSCAPES





# Implementing Living Landscapes



## Key principles

1. Landscapes and wildlife provide many essential services and intrinsic values
2. Local knowledge and participation is important
3. Larger scale and more connected is better but local landscapes are still important
4. Action is long term, with lag effects and seasonal variation
5. Protected and unprotected sites and species are included
6. Landscape scale work can be complex
7. Equal access for all
8. Importance of views and panoramas of landscapes

We work closely with partner organisations and London's communities to promote the wildlife on their doorstep. Living Landscape schemes improve access to wildlife and green spaces and provide opportunities for recreation, education and hands-on volunteering. In fact, volunteers are often vital to the success of the schemes.

## Delivering other London greening initiatives

The All London Green Grid is a GLA-led strategy to provide a framework for the creation, enhancement and management of multifunctional green and open spaces across the whole of Greater London. **London's Living Landscapes can act as a vision and delivery mechanism for the All London Green Grid with special emphasis on biodiversity conservation and access to nature.**

The Mayor's commitment to continue improving London's green space and public realm by creating pocket parks and planting street trees. **London's Living Landscapes could be a focus for the improvement of pocket parks for biodiversity and people whilst the planting of suitable street trees could be aligned with landscapes such as the Great North Wood.**

In 1992, the UK government signed the Rio Convention and committed to halting biodiversity loss through the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The London Biodiversity Partnership oversaw the London Biodiversity Action Plan. Much has been delivered on the Plan however as the national structures and priorities has changed, commitment to the LBP has ended. **London's Living Landscapes should provide a new focus that would deliver biodiversity within a new London Nature Partnership.**





The Natural Environment White Paper commits Government to assist partnerships of local authorities, local communities and landowners, the private sector and conservation organisations to establish new Nature Improvement Areas, based on a local assessment of opportunities for restoring and connecting nature on a significant scale. **London's Living Landscapes can complement existing Nature Improvement Areas in the capital and establish new ones.**

The capital's built environment and green spaces support surprising biodiversity. There about 1550 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation in London covering over 30,000 hectares and 19% of London's total land area. Up-to-date borough surveys and positive management are needed to ensure these Wildlife Sites remain fundamental core areas for biodiversity conservation. **London's Living Landscapes could help ensure that the capital's wildlife sites do not remain as isolated reserves but connect to form whole corridors, stepping stones and landscapes.**

The Water Framework Directive seeks to manage river catchments. **London's Living Landscapes can expand and support catchment plans by addressing riparian management and biodiversity.**

The *Natural Deal* is a proposal from The Wildlife Trusts for further investment in the UK's natural green infrastructure to simultaneously address some of the most challenging and costly issues facing government and wider society today – youth unemployment, climate change and biodiversity loss. **London's Living Landscapes could provide the opportunities through which unemployed people can gain the skills, confidence and motivation to move into employment – either within the natural environment sector or in other parts of the economy.**



*Top left to right: Clapton Park Estate; Gutteridge meadows, Hillingdon; Thames Marshes at Crossness, Belvedere Above: Walthamstow Reservoirs*

*Opposite page top left: playing in natural settings, Sutton; volunteers at Frays Farm, Hillingdon; Left: woods at Bexley Above: part of the urban forest in south London*

# Examples of London's Living Landscapes

## Capital Downs

A collection of dry valley systems containing chalk grassland, chalk scrub and woodland skirting the North Downs, on the southern fringes of London and northern Surrey. Working with the Kent and Surrey Wildlife Trusts in the Green Belt there are high quality wildlife sites amongst other land uses – arable, pasture, landfill and golf courses.

**The River Crane** forms part of the west London Green Chain, a 32 km stretch of interconnected green spaces that runs along the River Crane and the Yeading Brook. It is recognised as a vital wildlife corridor. The River Crane becomes tidal near the Thames - a unique feature amongst west London's rivers.

**The Lee Valley** forms a 'natural' corridor on London's doorstep and stretches 42 km along the banks of the River Lee, from Hertfordshire, through Essex, to the Thames. It contains a variety of landscapes and open spaces, industrial heritage sites and nature reserves, marshes and reservoirs. The London and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trusts help manage this Living Landscape, which is within the Lee Valley Regional Park.

**The Colne Valley** on the western fringes of London faces threats including habitat loss and fragmentation, flood risk, inappropriate development, pollution, and invasive species. The London and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trusts help manage this Living Landscape, which is within the Colne Valley Regional Park.

**The Wandle Valley** runs north westerly from Waddon to the Thames at Wandsworth. It had reputedly the highest density of water mills of any river in England. Much improved through conservation and still flowing through significant stretches of industry, housing and commercial centres.

## Totteridge Meadows

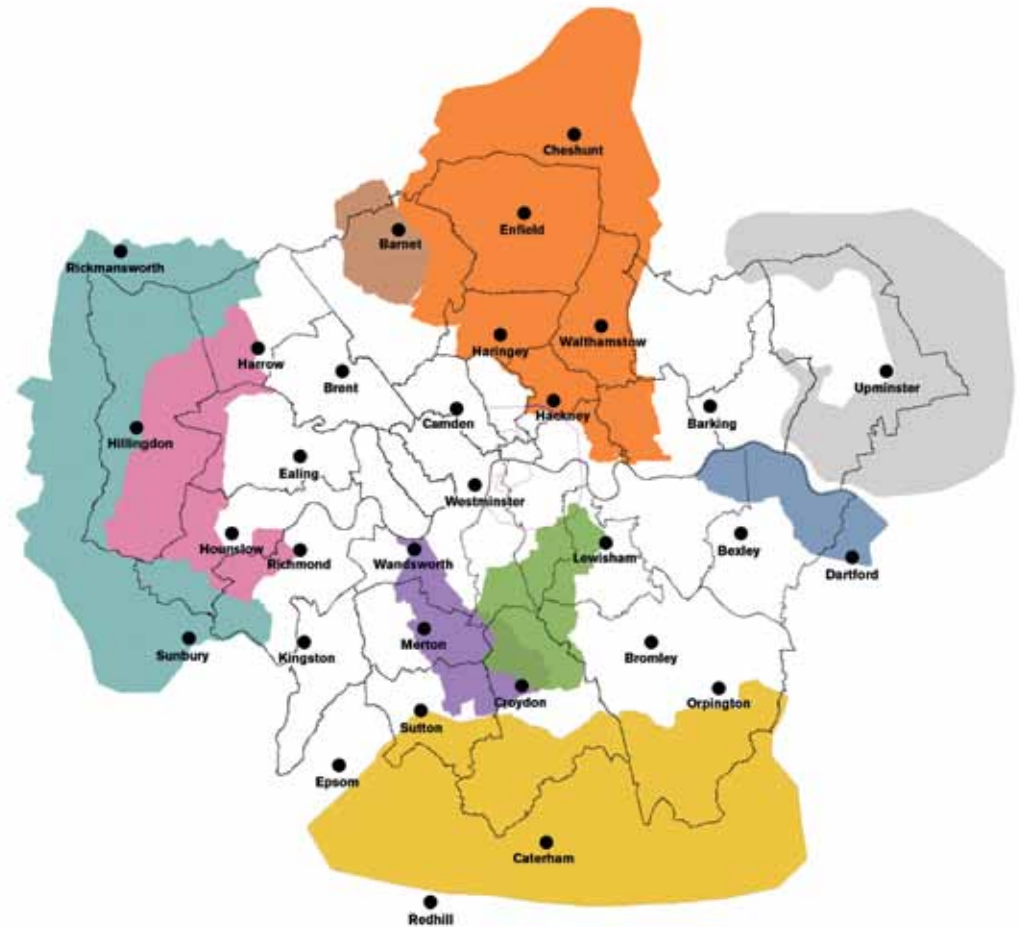
The largest remaining swathe of open countryside with hay meadows that once helped to feed London's horse traffic until the 1920s, containing relict neutral grassland, hedgerows, feature trees, and skirted by the Dollis Brook Valley that supports a high proportion of important wildlife sites.

## Great North Wood

The Great North Wood once stretched across the high ridge of land between Deptford, Selhurst and Streatham, surviving as a mixture of oak-hornbeam woodland, wood-pasture commons, and arable land until the early 19th century. Over 20 woodlands are now found within the area, together with a wide range of other sites of wildlife value.

## Erith, Crayford and Dartford Marshes

Just south of the Thames, located in the Thames Gateway, is an expanse of marshland covering over 500ha, some of the last remaining floodplain grazing marshes in London. They are now restricted to an area between Thamesmead, Belvedere and Dartford.



## Havering ridge, Beam and Ingrebourne Valleys and Marshes

A complex of green space in north-east London and includes rivers, marshes and commons, which form Living Landscapes managed jointly with Essex Wildlife Trust.

## London's gardens

The 3 million gardens covering 38,000 hectares, over 23% of London – form the single largest type of green space use within the Capital, the place where most Londoners have a direct contact with the natural world, and importantly witness the impacts of climate change on nature.

Smaller, more local landscapes can be found throughout London.





London's Living Landscapes involves the recreation of robust, resilient and connected landscapes; a network of natural greenspaces, river valleys and topographical features shaping the neighbourhoods of the city. London's Living Landscapes are rich in wildlife, highly valued and accessible to people. They provide opportunities for learning, health and wellbeing. What is good for wildlife is good for people too. London's Living Landscapes help diverse local communities to thrive. They will safeguard our wildlife through an unprecedented period of change.



“The last time the UK's wildlife faced a challenge on this scale was at the end of the last ice age. We need to find ways to help our wildlife become more resilient to the trials it faces in the 21st century. We must now work on a landscape scale if we are to give wildlife a chance and allow future generations to enjoy nature as we have”.

**Sir David Attenborough**

Vice President of The Wildlife Trusts



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