



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 well-vegetated 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. The demand for suburban infill or backland development to meet targets for housing has resulted in loss of garden habitat in some areas. However, inappropriate garden design and/or management appears to be more significant, especially over the past decade; 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 gardens' value for wildlife include pesticide use, indirect pollution and climate change.

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 infrastructure: in supporting biodiversity; as refuges for some important species; and as places for people to experience nature on their doorstep;
- We recognise 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;
- We will work to maintain (and enhance where possible) the extent and value of London's gardens for the benefit of people and wildlife;
- We have identified London's Gardens as a 'Living Landscape' scheme and will work with a wide range of partners to develop and implement a shared vision for London's gardens, in line with other initiatives, such as the All London Green Grid, Drain London, and river Catchment Plans.

Design and management

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

- We support the Government's commitment to phase out the use of peat by 2030;
- We support 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;
- We discourage the use of non-native invasive plants in gardens that are a threat to London's wildlife, in line with the guidelines to be set out by the GB Non-native Species Secretariat.

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;
- We advocate for the ecological and amenity value of London's gardens to be accounted for in Local Development Frameworks, local BAPs, climate change strategies, and other relevant planning guidance;
- We support 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);
- We support *The London Plan's* encouragement for a presumption against development on back gardens or other private residential gardens where this can be locally justified, and for approaches to the surfacing of front gardens to reflect the broader policies of the Plan, including the need for such surfaces to be permeable, subject to permitted development rights.
- We support the national requirement for planning permission to install impermeable surfaces in front gardens but will support measures to further improve this to prevent vegetation loss.

Promotion

- The Trust will work with members of the public, the Mayor, local authorities, developers, water companies, community organisations and other stakeholders to promote the value of London's gardens;
- We will continue to run a wildlife gardening campaign in order to inform and engage Londoners to enhance the value of London's gardens for wildlife and climate change;
- We will promote the use of peat alternatives in gardens, in line with TWT's guidelines on the use of peat-based products;
- We will promote the use of organic and sustainable gardening methods wherever possible;
- We will encourage gardeners to work with their neighbours to create garden 'wildlife corridors' and 'stepping stones', and to share expertise and resources;
- We 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 media (e.g. the website, garden campaign materials, social media);
- We 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);
- We 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). They may be wholly or partially vegetated, or completely devoid in vegetation.

Gardens were declassified as brownfield land by Government in June 2010.¹ This is likely to reduce (but not halt) garden loss through in-fill developments, giving local authorities more power to refuse planning applications. This has been further reinforced by policy within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012) and *The London Plan* (2015).

Coverage

The rapid growth of suburban London in the last century, when combined with existing areas of Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian suburbs, has 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.

About 2 million dwellings in Greater London have associated garden space. These support over 3.8 million garden plots covering an area of 37,900 hectares, approximately 24% of the city's surface. Of this, 22,000 ha are vegetated (c57%), which equates to 14% of London being garden greenspace (GiGL, 2009). There are an estimated 2.5 million garden trees in London.

Gardens range 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 from 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, and are widely recognised as providing valuable habitat for a significant number of species. The mosaic of gardens across London acts as an 'urban nature reserve' and contributes to the 'urban forest'. For many people these are the places where they have most frequent contact with nature.

Our understanding of the value of gardens to biodiversity – not only locally but also at a landscape scale - has improved significantly over the past 15 years through some dedicated research.² Gardens can provide a rich variety of wildlife habitats such as mature trees, hedges, shrubberies, lawns, herbaceous areas, deadwood, and ponds, and support an often astounding array of species. Dense undergrowth provides good breeding sites for small birds and mammals, many of which have suffered significant declines in the countryside. Hedgehog, bats, butterflies, stag beetle 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 snake, badger, red fox and many birds (such as finches, warblers and woodpeckers). Many national and London Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species are associated with gardens, for example house sparrow, song thrush and common toad.

Gardens help to provide shade, absorb carbon, soak up precipitation and retain water, and help to cool the city. A strong network well vegetated gardens stretching across the capital will provide room for species to move freely and adapt to our changing climate.

¹ **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.

² For example, the Biodiversity of Urban Gardens (BUGS) research carried out by the University of Sheffield, 2000-07.

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 2010 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.³ 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), and suggests that this activity is by far the most significant threat to garden habitats, and less easy to regulate.

Protection

Whilst there has been recent beneficial changes to planning policy, there is still very little legislative protection given to gardens. As undeveloped land has become scarcer in the city, gardens have been 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. This is reflected in the NPPF (para 53) and London Plan policy 3.5 (para 3.33). 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, as demonstrated in the research above.

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.

Surface water management

Since April 2012, under the Flood & Water Management Act, 2010, local authorities are the Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) and have full responsibility for managing flood risk from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses. In London, a collaborative approach – *Drain London*⁴ – is taking this forward; each London borough will have developed a surface water management plans (SWMP) that will contain the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment and a Flood Risk Management Plan, both being requirements under the Act. This Act requires boroughs to investigate and address flood risk problems and maintain a public register of Flood Risk Management assets by 2015

Gardens are critical to the management of surface water across much of London, and their management and protection – as vegetated and permeable spaces should be key components of SWMPs. However, as yet it is too early to ascertain how embedded private gardens will be in the future management of surface water and flood risk.

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

³ Smith, C. (2011), *London: garden city? Investigating the changing anatomy of London's private gardens, and the scale of their loss*, London Wildlife Trust.

⁴ A partnership of 33 London boroughs, the Environment Agency, Thames Water, Transport for London and London Councils

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 the Trust's 'Garden for a Living London' and the RHS/Wildlife Trusts' 'Wild about Gardens' promote gardening for wildlife and climate change. The results of the research into the changes of London's gardens will help to shape and strengthen the Trust's future gardening campaign.

The London Biodiversity Partnership's Private Gardens Habitat Action Plan Group worked to promote the immense value of gardens to wildlife both to London's gardeners and to legislators; this work has become largely embedded in local BAPs and other initiatives. Demonstration sites and information centres across the capital such as those at the Trust's Centre for Wildlife Gardening, the Chelsea Physic Garden, and the Museum of Garden History, demonstrate the techniques and skills required to garden for wildlife.

The Government, under Defra, set out its plans for reducing the horticultural use of peat in the Natural Environment White Paper (2011), including an ambition to reduce peat use to zero by 2030, including the milestones of a voluntary phase-out target of 2020 for amateur gardeners; and a voluntary phase-out target of 2030 for professional growers of fruit, vegetables and plants. In order to ensure that these goals are met the Sustainable Growing Media Task Force was set up in 2012, bringing together representatives from across the supply chain with a clear remit to advise on how best to overcome the barriers to reducing peat use, exploring all the available measures to achieve this goal, in order to put the industry on a sustainable footing for the future. However, Governmental leadership on this matter has stalled since 2015.

3. Related Policies, Strategies and Action Plans

National:

National Planning Policy Framework

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/nppf

Guidance on the permeable surfacing of front gardens

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pavingfrontgardens

Sustainable Growing Media Task Force

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221026/pb13834-sustainable-growing-media.pdf

London:

The London Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (2011)

www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_migrate_files_destination/Adaptation-oct11.pdf

The London Plan (2015)

www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/current-london-plan

London Sustainable Drainage Action Plan (2016)

www.london.gov.uk/WHAT-WE-DO/environment/environment-publications/london-sustainable-drainage-action-plan

London Biodiversity Action Plan: London Private Gardens Habitat Action Plan (HAP) and various SAPs/HAPs

See www.gigl.org.uk/london-bap-priority-habitats/

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

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

Biodiversity in Urban Gardens research: www.bugs.group.shef.ac.uk/BUGS1/bugs1-index.html

Green Space Information for Greater London: www.gigl.org.uk/

London Wildlife Trust; Garden for a Living London campaign:
www.wildlondon.org.uk/garden-for-a-living-London

Wild about Gardens (RHS and The Wildlife Trusts): wildaboutgardens.org.uk/