

# **London Diocesan Advisory Committee**



## **BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS**

---

- 1. BACKGROUND**
  - 2. ACTION BEING TAKEN**
  - 3. CASE STUDY: REPORT OF LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**
  - 4. ISSUES RAISED IN REPORT**
  - 5. SUMMARY**
- 

### **1. BACKGROUND**

(a) In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Rio Earth Summit, took place, in order to consider the urgent problems facing the environment and the need for sustainable development. One of the major outcomes of this summit was a document called Agenda 21, which among many objectives required each nation to conserve biodiversity and to involve local communities in all aspects of developments including conservation. The UK was one of many signatories.

(b) In 1997 the London Biodiversity Partnership was formed, and, in co-operation with the London Wildlife Trust, a plan of action was established. In addition the Mayor of London has published a Biodiversity Strategy. All the initiatives of local planning authorities, together with programmes run by English Nature or non government organisations like 'Plant life', contribute to a UK strategy.

(c) The aims of the London Biodiversity Partnership in relation to churchyards and cemeteries are as follows:

- *To develop a strategic approach to the protection, management and enhancement of the nature conservation value of cemeteries and churchyards.*
- *To respect the primary purpose of cemeteries and churchyards, which is that of burial and as a space to accommodate grieving visitors, whilst sensitively promoting their nature conservation value.*
- *To secure the involvement of all London's communities in the conservation of churchyards and cemeteries.*

*It continues: Cemeteries and churchyards make a significant contribution to the provision of urban greenspace in London, offering a quiet sanctuary for both people and wildlife. They therefore represent a real opportunity for new kinds of conservation and green space policy...*

(d) Cemeteries identified as Sites of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation in local planning authority Unitary Development Plans are Highgate, Abney Park, Kensal Green, Nunhead, Tower Hamlets and Morden<sup>1</sup>. No London churchyards are at present classified as being of Metropolitan Importance. However, in addition to the first three listed above, five other churchyards and cemeteries in the Diocese of London are included in English Heritage's "Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest," and many others are within local planning authorities' Conservation Areas. In addition to Abney Park, St John's Wood Churchyard is also designated by English Nature as a local nature reserve. The potential exists for any churchyards with exceptional fauna or flora to be designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, but there are not believed to be any such designations at present in the Diocese.

(e) The historical asset of graves and their inscriptions is increasingly valued, and very many are now listed in their own right by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. We know of more than 70; a handful of these are I or II\*, the rest are Grade II.

(f) In 2001 a House of Commons Select Committee Cemeteries Report recommended that cemetery managers should evaluate the biodiversity potential of their cemeteries and manage accordingly, that the Living Churchyards and Cemetery Project (which has published advisory documents, run open days and began a project on cemetery management) should continue, and that English Heritage and English Nature should develop special assessment procedures.

## **2. ACTION BEING TAKEN**

---

<sup>1</sup> Nunhead and Morden are not in the Diocese of London

(a) The term 'Biodiversity Action Plan' covers a huge range of documents. A plan can be written for a single population of one species, a habitat, a borough, or the entire planet. Many areas have a biodiversity action plan for the borough with broad conservation objectives and many additional biodiversity action plans, which detail the management of sensitive sites and vulnerable species. The following website demonstrates the scope of the process: [www.ukbap.org.uk](http://www.ukbap.org.uk).

(b) In a section of the London Biodiversity Action Plan named *Generic Action* the following three objectives are listed:

**Objective 1.** *To protect the biodiversity interests of London's churchyards and cemeteries.*

*Targets:*

- *Create a comprehensive database of sites and their wildlife by 2011.*
- *Establish a 'Churchyards and Cemeteries Biodiversity Working Group' by 2002.*
- *Develop and co-ordinate a popular survey for burial grounds by 2005.*
- *Ensure that cemetery and churchyard elements are distinguished within the GLA rolling programme of survey by 2002.*
- *Encourage the declaration of suitable sites as Local Nature Reserves – ongoing.*
- *Monitor re-use and development proposals – ongoing.*

**Objective 2.** *To promote conservation management in cemeteries and churchyards in London.*

*Targets:*

- *Implement a range of mechanisms for sharing information and expertise by 2006.*
- *Establish a forum of people who manage churchyards and cemeteries of known wildlife value by 2002.*
- *Disseminate advice for biodiversity in burial ground management by 2003.*
- *Produce a generic article promoting biodiversity enhancements for publication in professional journals and newsletters by 2004.*
- *Review the biodiversity content of existing cemetery management training by 2004.*
- *Organise a training workshop/course for site managers as required by 2005.*
- *Encourage the inclusion of ecological criteria within the Memorial Awareness Board's 'Cemetery of the Year' award by 2006.*

**Objective 3.** *To promote the biodiversity value of churchyards and cemeteries to the wider public and to express the important role they play in the quality of life for Londoners.*

*Targets:*

- *Raise public awareness through a combination of publications and events by 2006.*
- *Establish links and organise joint initiatives with various faith groups by 2003.*
- *Produce a promotional leaflet on sites accessible by public transport by 2005.*
- *Review and revise as necessary existing school educational packs by 2003.*
- *Organise a London-wide 'Action Day' by 2005.*

(c) For each of the points under each target, the lead action taker responsible for co-ordinating the actions and other partners who have been involved in forming the plan are listed by the London Biodiversity Partnership. They emphasise that new partners are both welcome and needed.

### **3. CASE STUDY: REPORT OF LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS**

(a) On 13 November 2002, Alison Boyce of the Diocese of London attended a meeting regarding the implementation of a Biodiversity Action Plan in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

(b) Action plans had been arranged into 4 groups, and this group was discussing Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland, Grassland, Meadows and Pastures, Parks, Amenity Gardens and City Squares and Cemeteries and grounds of Places of Worship.

(c) The group was co-ordinated by Ros Brewer, an architect for the horticultural department. Members included officers of the local planning authority, the Environment Trust, Friends of Mile End Park, Mudchute Park and Farm and Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. The draft Biodiversity Action Plan was to be complete by the end of January 2003.

(d) It was explained that a template was needed, against which achievements could be reported to targets. Data collection needed to be carried out in a standard way. Each action plan had to be capable of being monitored, and it should be possible to see real change at the end of five years. It was important to link with the London Wildlife Trust, and share information of species and habitats. There had been a lack of recording in the past. In fact, 20% of the British population of the Black

Redstart, a rare species of bird, were found in the borough, and 50% of all the Thameside woodland between Ham and Barking.

(e) Key species had to be identified, and objectives set, as to increasing and enhancing them, and how to set about monitoring them.

#### **4. ISSUES RAISED IN REPORT**

(a) The need for explanation and interpretation. Action needed to be accompanied by notices or interactive displays, so that the public understood the reasons for any changes in management.

(b) The increase of woodland areas in parks could be problematic, due to cleaning and security issues. Care needed to be taken in selecting appropriate sites and locations.

(c) There was a great demand on each green space. Rationing and balancing of interests needed to take place.

(d) There was a lot that could be done in terms of changing current practices, such as tree species used in street planting. For instance wild cherry trees were preferable to ornamental species with double blooms which were inaccessible to insects.

(e) A lot could also be done to change current practice in looking after what existed to the highest possible standard. The approach taken towards maintenance contracts needed to be scrutinised. Previously the cheapest contract had tended to be taken up. The standard of performance of contractors had to be increased.

(f) The careful replacement of individual trees was an achievable target, particularly the replacement of trees that had gone from their sites. It was acknowledged that some people were not keen on any trees due to their use by pigeons, their proximity to buildings causing leaf fall into gutters, and the security risk they posed. More low level planting could take place around trees.

(g) Action photographs taken over a day of the use of, for instance, a park, could identify areas which were less heavily used and had more potential for change. The photographs could be shown to the public during a consultation. All issues had to be identified, and all relevant organisations drawn together.

(h) The conflict between football pitches and grassland was acknowledged. It was suggested that football pitches were over-

emphasised. The political programme was another factor which had to be taken into consideration.

(i) The Biodiversity Action Plan from the London Borough of Bromley was available, and seemed a model of good practice. It included the following targets:

- *Identify and advise any private owners of cemeteries on the wildlife value of their sites, availability of grants and opportunity for community involvement by 2005.*
- *Contact PCCs to provide advice on management of open churchyards (open for burials).*
- *Contact PCCs of closed churchyards (closed for burials) to discuss the Council's management of the sites – both ongoing but stronger links to be established by 2005.*
- *Encourage advice to be sought from lichenologists and bryologists before any action is taken to lay headstones flat or treat headstones or conserve important walls (eg. Control of ivy, use of lime mortar), so that mitigation can be considered. Provision of contact list to site managers and developing links from 2003.*
- *Support the organisation of a training workshop for site managers by the Churchyards and Cemeteries Biodiversity Working Group by 2005.*
- *Support the dissemination of advice for biodiversity in burial ground management by the Churchyards and Cemeteries Biodiversity Working Group by 2005.*
- *Support the establishment of a forum of people who manage burial grounds of known wildlife value by the Churchyards and Cemeteries Biodiversity Working Group by 2005.*

(j) All this work is positive, and tremendously encouraging.

## **5. SUMMARY**

(a) A letter has been sent to the 18 local planning authorities in the Diocese of London area, requesting a copy of their biodiversity action plan. Local planning authorities have implemented local Agenda 21 in different ways. Some are very active in any area from transport to waste, others less so.

(b) Six have not replied. One stated that they did not have a plan. Seven are working on their plans. Two of these invited the DAC to meetings, at one of which we were able to be represented. Two have sent copies. Two will send copies of drafts once these are available.

(c) Six copies of our paper on Churches and Wildlife have been supplied where this seemed appropriate. This paper is now being adapted to take account of the Green Code published by Kew Gardens.

(d) The DAC is also exchanging information with the London Historic Parks & Gardens Trust, who are conducting a programme of field visits.

(e) The Diocese of London, as a significant and responsible landowner, needs to be responsive to local concerns and commitments. This will require liaising with the various organisers of the biodiversity action plan process in every borough in which land is held, and feeding information back to the volunteers who manage churchyards and burial grounds. This is necessary if the conservation potential of each site is to be fulfilled.

**London Diocesan Advisory Committee  
August 2004**