

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Nature Conservation Policy Statement 2019

This Statement sets out Richmond Council's policies for the protection and enhancement of nature conservation in the borough, with a specific emphasis on maintaining and improving biodiversity and wildlife habitats.

Context

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (LBRuT) is one of the greenest London boroughs with over 57% of the borough open space (source GiGL 2018) including over 130 Council owned and managed parks. Twenty-seven Richmond Council owned sites are managed primarily for nature conservation and many more are partially managed for biodiversity and wildlife. The London Borough of Richmond is a population 'hotspot' for bats and Stag Beetles and the only place in London where the rare Tower Mustard (*Arabis galabra*) can be found. Richmond upon Thames is the only Council to straddle both sides of the River Thames, containing both tidal and non-tidal river habitats, and contributes to over 50% of the Lowland Acid Grassland in London, a National Priority Habitat.

Current Position

All LBRuT open space is managed in accordance with a set of Strategic Principles (Appendix 1). Nature conservation is embedded into these strategic principles with a firm commitment to ensure wildlife habitats are managed and improved. These sites are managed directly by the Council, but also by working in partnership with local and regional wildlife groups. The Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) describes some of the priority habitats and species found across the Borough (Appendix 2).

The Council recognises that:

It has a duty under the Natural Rural and Communities Act (NERC Act 2006) to consider biodiversity conservation within all its functions as a public body.

Nature Conservation Sites provide a sense of place and community as well as an educational resource. They contribute to the overall ambience of the borough and provide seasonal interest with flowers, fruit, colour and fragrance. They also provide excellent spaces for recreational activities such as walking, running and cycling and it has long been known that open spaces and wildlife have positive health and well-being benefits which reduces the burden on our health services.

Green Infrastructure/Wildlife corridors¹, provide important movement and feeding resources for plants and animals. They strengthen gene pools, provide greater species resilience from climate change and improve resistance to invasive non-native species.

Natural landscapes provide welcoming and relaxing backdrops within the urban environment, provide a natural filter whereby trees and woodlands absorb pollution and carbon dioxide from the air, particularly from vehicles such as cars, vans, lorries and aeroplanes.

Well managed Nature Conservation Sites provide excellent habitats for a wide variety of species including European and Nationally protected species such as bats and water voles.

Habitats and species are not defined by manmade boundaries and action taken on neighbouring land can impact upon species and habitats within Richmond Borough landscapes (e.g. exterior lighting, noise and planting).

The Council believes that by understanding and appreciating the benefits that Nature Conservation provides, it can commit to strategies that safeguard and maximise opportunities for wildlife.

Statutory obligations

The Council understands and is committed to meeting its statutory obligations, specifically: -

- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended (WCA)
- The Natural and Communities Act 2006 (NERC)
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW)
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 as amended (Habitats Directive)

This Policy Statement also recognises National, Regional and Local policies including

National

- Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services
- The National Planning Policy Framework (currently under review)

Regional

- Green infrastructure of The London Plan (currently under review)
- Connecting with London's Nature: The Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy
- All London Green Grid

Local

- LPs 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 of the Richmond Local Plan (adopted July 2018)

Policy Priorities

Partnership working

The Council will work in partnership with the Richmond Biodiversity Partnership to ensure a relevant and current Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan; to conserve and improve the biodiversity of the Borough. The Action Plan will be reviewed when appropriate and at no longer than 10 year intervals.

The Council will work with relevant partners and landowners where possible, to ensure a strategic approach to the protection, enhancement, creation, promotion and management of Nature Conservation Sites, including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SiNCs²) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This approach will include National, Regional and Local Nature Conservation guidance and targets such as the Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan and Biodiversity 2020.

The Council will work in partnership with appropriate organisations to survey and understand the distribution (and importantly identify areas of deficiency) of species and habitats throughout the borough and work towards maintaining and increasing biodiversity.

In accordance with the NERC Act 2006, officers will seek to influence and assist council departments in their duty to consider biodiversity and conservation within the scope of their work.

Council owned and managed sites

The Council will ensure that all its Nature Conservation Sites have 10-year management plans, and annually reviewed action plans. Each Management Plan will prioritise Richmond's Biodiversity Action Plans, National and Regional priority habitats and species.

To ensure that Nature Conservation Site management plans are relevant the Council will carry out habitat (and specific species) surveys at regular and no greater than 10 years apart on all its Nature Conservation Sites and amenity sites with Nature Conservation interest.

Habitats will be managed using relevant and up to date management techniques. Where surveys identify a need for new habitats to be created, the Council will, in partnership with local groups and organisations, create and manage those habitats, if necessary seeking additional resources.

The Council will protect and strengthen wildlife corridors¹ throughout the Borough as appropriate.

The Councils target is to ensure that the wildlife designation of all Council owned and managed land will be at a minimum of 'Local' within the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation hierarchy.

Species and habitat protection

When a species, their movement or habitat is thought to be under threat on Council owned and managed land the Council will intervene by implementing appropriate actions for their maintenance and protection.

The Council will act to reduce and control non-native invasive or damaging species on all Council owned and managed land through approved control programmes as per current legislation and best practice.

The Council will provide advice to private landowners how to comply with statutory legislation. Failure to comply with statutory legislation will result in the Council implementing Species Control agreements/Orders as per section 9A of the Infrastructure Act 2015.

The Council will report all known incidents to the relevant authority and will work with the Police to secure prosecution where possible.

Monitoring

In accordance with the London Plan, the Council will review all Sites of Importance for Nature Importance at appropriate intervals (no more than 10 yearly intervals).

The Council will collate information from landowners of SiNCs annually about the management of their sites to comply with the Government Single Data Indicator (No 160 for Local Nature Conservation/Biodiversity).

Planning Applications

When commenting on planning applications, officers will consider each application in accordance with current legislation, good practice with the aim to minimise the impacts on existing wildlife and increase biodiversity. Richmond's Biodiversity Action Plans and National and Regional priority habitats and species will be prioritised.

Where planning applications outside LBRuT affect nature conservation within the Borough, officers will comment appropriately to safeguard wildlife and habitats.

Planning Applications that affect species and habitats will only be assessed when submitted with the appropriate best practice surveys and in a format as per CIEEM guidance (Appendix C).

Review

This Policy statement will be reviewed every 5 years or earlier when required.

¹ Definition of Green Infrastructure/Wildlife Corridors

Green infrastructure is a network of multifunctional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Green infrastructure is not simply an alternative description for conventional open space. As a network it includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, but also street trees, allotments and private gardens. It can also include streams, canals and other water bodies and features such as green roofs and walls. Reference <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#para027>.

The Council also recognises the importance and value of corridors of dark interconnecting spaces to provide movement and habitat for light intolerant species.

² These sites are also known as Other Sites of Nature Importance (OSNIs) within the Richmond Local Plan and Local Wildlife Sites in other parts of the country.

Appendix A

Parks Strategic Principles

http://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/6901/parks_and_open_spaces_strategic_principles.pdf

Appendix B

Richmond Biodiversity Action Plan 2019 – 2022

https://swlen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/LBRuT_BAP_2019-06-06_version.pdf-resized.pdf

Appendix C

IEEM Report Guidance

<https://www.cieem.net/guidelines-for-ecological-report-writing>