



# City of Westminster

## A NATURE CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR WESTMINSTER.

The City Council recognises the importance of nature conservation in the heart of London. A nature conservation survey of the City conducted in 1995 revealed just how much wildlife can be found in Westminster's parks and gardens, and along the important natural corridors of the canal and river.

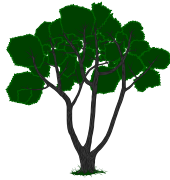
Protecting this resource and ensuring that new opportunities for wildlife are created wherever possible is an important part of the City Council's work. There have been enormous wildlife losses in the United Kingdom this century. We have lost over 100 species, including 7% of our dragonflies, 5% of our butterflies and more than 2% of our fish and mammals, and many of our hedgerows and ancient herb-rich meadows are gone. With our countryside facing mounting pressures from all sides, the wildlife which survives in our towns and cities is becoming increasingly important, both in its own right and as indicators of the health of the urban environment. However, that which remains often does so more by fortunate accident, and the work of interested local residents and land owners, rather than by deliberate planning.

In 1992 the UK Government signed the Biodiversity Convention at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, committing the UK, along with many other nations, to conserving the variety of life at local, national and international levels. As part of this international agreement, the City Council is committed to protecting wildlife and habitats in Westminster for the benefit of future generations.

But the conservation of the City's wildlife is not just for those who are to come. Wildlife in the city provides an important link for many of us with the natural world, without which the pressures of urban living would become intolerable. An environment which is clean, healthy and *alive* is important to the well-being and health of everyone, and also helps to attract vital business and tourism to our City. It is also very important to ensure that our school children have access to areas where they can gain experience of the natural world, and an understanding of their place within it, so that they can learn the vital skills of caring for our planet in the future.

The Nature Conservation Strategy for Westminster aims to provide a coherent framework and practical guide for co-ordinated action to protect and enhance the City's wildlife resource, for the good of those who live and work here now and in the future. This is not just a job for the Council, but for all of us - businesses, visitors, residents, voluntary organisations, the police, and many others who have a role to play in protecting Westminster's biodiversity. A sustainable future can only be achieved if our environment remains able to support the diversity of plant and animal life which currently exists here. It is therefore vital that we ensure that natural ecosystems and wildlife are protected and conserved, and that we seek to provide new opportunities for wildlife in our City wherever possible.

***The following Nature Conservation Strategy has been prepared for the City Of Westminster with the help of the London Ecology Unit***



## **The Nature Conservation Strategy for Westminster aims to:**



### **Protect, conserve and enhance habitats and features of nature conservation value in the City.**

Wildlife sites require protection from development and need to be carefully managed if they are to retain their particular interest. The strategy seeks to protect and conserve sites of interest and to promote the application of management plans for important sites within the Council's ownership in the City, to enhance habitats and features of nature conservation value, and to encourage other landowners to do likewise.



### **Enhance other wildlife habitats and create new opportunities for wildlife wherever possible.**

Sites and opportunities arise in the City where ecological enhancement could produce valuable wildlife habitats.

Due to the relatively small amount of open space owned by the Council such opportunities are rare, but the Council will seek to take them wherever possible.



### **Encourage landowners to manage greenspace in ways which conserve and enhance wildlife value.**

The City Council can control land management on its own land holdings, but many of the City's wildlife habitats are owned by other bodies, such as the royal parks, private estates, companies and individual householders. They will also have a major role to play in improving the City's nature conservation resource. The Council, through this strategy, aims to influence other landowners to adopt an ecologically sensitive approach to greenspace management.

[Note: The Royal Parks, i.e. Hyde Park, Regent's Park, St James's Park, Green Park and Kensington Gardens, are owned by the Crown, and are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for National Heritage. They are managed by the Royal Parks Agency, whose conservation policy is set out in an appendix to this document.]



### **Improve public contact and enjoyment of nature.**

Everyday contact with wildlife and the natural world can provide an important counter-balance to relieve the increasing stresses of overcrowding, traffic congestion, noise and air pollution. In an urban environment such as the City, nature conservation is as much about people's enjoyment of wildlife as it is about the protection of important habitats and species. Every effort should be made to bring wildlife into people's lives; in most cases wildlife sites should be easily accessible to the public. Westminster's parks and open spaces provide an opportunity for people living and working in the heart of the city to enjoy nature: the strategy seeks to enhance this experience.



### **Maximise educational opportunities and raise awareness of nature in an urban setting.**

With increasing significance being attached to environmental issues in a global context, it is important that children and adults have easy access to environmental education at a local level. Biodiversity is ultimately lost or conserved at the local level, and sustainable development requires that we all have an appreciation of the natural world and an understanding of our place within it. This is most effectively achieved through direct experience. Many inner city schools and children do not have regular contact with the countryside and the provision of wildlife study areas close to schools can provide a vital resource in this respect.



### **Promote biodiversity within the City and ensure that the wildlife resource is managed in a sustainable way as part of the City's Local Agenda 21 programme.**

The Government is committed to the conservation of biodiversity at a national and international level. The value of the urban environment for wildlife has only recently been fully appreciated. As wildlife declines in some habitats outside cities, so the mosaic of gardens, parks, rivers and encapsulated former countryside inside towns and cities has become a haven for some species of plants and animals.



### **Establish targets and indicators to enable the monitoring of progress and success.**

Now that the extent and value of the City's wildlife resource has been established, one of the aims of the strategy is to facilitate the ongoing monitoring of the Council's ecology and environmental policies, which will ultimately reflect the health of the City's wildlife resource. Targets and indicators must to be established in order to evaluate progress.

The **principles and policies** within this strategy are designed to achieve these aims. They are divided into three distinct areas:



**PLANNING PRINCIPLES**



**LOCAL AUTHORITY ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES**



**PROMOTIONAL POLICIES**



1

## PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The City Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) is the land use planning document for Westminster. The UDP currently provides planning policy guidance for nature conservation in the City. The Plan is expected to be adopted in early 1997. To ensure that the natural environment is fully considered in future development proposals, the City Council will produce a Supplementary Planning Guidance Note on Nature Conservation by April 1997. The Supplementary Planning Guidance Note will be a material consideration in deciding planning applications but will not have the statutory weight of the UDP.

The draft planning principles set out in this section of the strategy will be further developed and considered as part of the general environmental appraisal of the UDP that will be undertaken as part of the first review of the Plan. Existing UDP policy is presented in plain text. The additional draft principles that will be considered for eventual incorporation into the UDP are underlined.

### 1.1 **Strategic Policy For Nature Conservation** (This sets the strategic framework by which the City Council will deal with nature conservation in the City).

"To seek enhancement of Metropolitan Open Land, with special reference to its appearance, public access and enjoyment, and to protect sites or features of nature conservation importance. The impact of all proposals on ecological habitats will be of particular concern and the introduction of wildlife and the enhancement of ecological habitats will be encouraged."

### 1.2 **General Policy Principle on Nature Conservation** (This will enable the City Council to assess the impact of any new development proposal on the City's nature conservation resource)

"The City Council will take into account the impact of proposals on ecological habitats. Where development proposals are acceptable in principle, they should include measures to mitigate their effects upon features of nature conservation value wherever appropriate, and conditions may be imposed to such ends.

The City Council will encourage ecological landscaping proposals which take into account existing ecological features, help to create new wildlife habitats (or which seek to restore or compensate for loss of, or damage to, wildlife habitat) and support their effective management. Where appropriate, the City Council will enter into legal agreements in order to safeguard the nature conservation value of land. Where developments fall outside its powers of control, it will seek to protect nature conservation sites through negotiation and persuasion."

**1.3 Policy Principle for Specific Nature Conservation Sites** (This will seek to protect sites of nature conservation importance from development).

“Planning permission for the carrying out of development on or under public and private open space of amenity, recreational or nature conservation value will not normally be granted except where it is ancillary to its recreational use as open space. Development will not normally be permitted which may destroy or adversely affect other sites of nature conservation importance identified on the Proposals Map. Until such time as the Sites of Nature Conservation Importance are incorporated onto the Proposals Map, they shall be taken as those identified by the 1995 survey and subjected to public consultation.”

[Of the sites of nature conservation importance identified in the 1995 survey, there is one site, Paddington Goods Yard, which has development proposals and which would require exemption from the above policy. This site could be covered adequately by an addition to Chapter 4 of the UDP ‘Paddington Special Protection Area’, PSPA 2 (K):

The following benefits are attained:

(5) The enhancement or creation of wildlife habitats, where appropriate, especially in relation to the canal and existing public open space.]

**1.4 Policy Principle for the River Thames and its Foreshore.** (This takes into account the ecological considerations of development proposals affecting the River Thames).

“The City Council may grant planning permission for piers where it can be satisfied that such development is necessary to improve public access to the River Thames for waterborne recreation and transport, and where the design, size and siting of such a structure will not adversely affect the ecological character and functioning of the waterside setting.

Encroachment on the tidal foreshore should not: reduce the storage volume of the river; lead to a loss of foreshore habitat; interrupt the flow of the river or alter the velocity of flow; reduce public access to the riverside or the foreshore; release pollutants from contaminated land into the river; impair the integrity or stability of Tidal defences. Development proposals should, wherever appropriate, seek to protect and/or provide wildlife habitats, and enhance the natural environment of the river. “

**1.5 Policy Principle for Wildlife Corridors etc.** (The main wildlife corridors in the City are the River Thames and the Grand Union Canal, although there may be more local linkages such as those formed by tree-lined roads and avenues and garden squares and parks.)

“The Council will identify wildlife corridors on the Proposals Map and will seek proposals to enhance their value for nature conservation, amenity, landscape or access. Until such time as the wildlife corridors are incorporated onto the Proposals Map, they shall be taken as those identified by the 1995 survey.”

- 1.6 **Policy Principle for Encouraging Public Access** (Public access to wildlife sites is important and the Council is keen to promote it where appropriate, and where it does not result in the undue disturbance of wildlife populations.)

“The Council will promote appropriate access to nature conservation sites for people’s enjoyment of nature and to facilitate environmental education. The council will aim to promote access and facilities for all, especially for those with mobility difficulties or sensory impairments.”

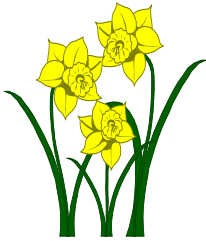
- 1.7 **Policy Principle for Trees** (Many trees are important to the ecology of a location, and these will also be protected. the Council is aware of the need to selectively remove old trees to make space for young replacements, and so maintain an evenly balanced age structure. The Council’s tree strategy AIMS to increase the diversity of tree species and reduce reliance on the London Plane.)

“The Council will protect trees wherever they make an important contribution to the ecology, appearance or amenity of the locality, and work towards a tree population with a healthy mix of ages and species.”

- 1.8 **Policy Principle for Roof Gardens** (Roof gardens are a major opportunity in the City for the creation of wildlife habitats on buildings and further advice can be found in the London Ecology Unit publication 'Building Green: A Guide to Using Plants on Roofs, Walls and Pavements' (LEU 1993).)

“Roof level conservatories and gardens will not normally be acceptable where they will have a detrimental effect upon the character of a building or an area. The City Council will seek to resist roof-level clutter where it would be seen from the street or adversely affect the visual amenity of adjoining properties. Where roof gardens are appropriate in design and amenity terms, the City Council will actively promote their creation as wildlife habitats on buildings, particularly in areas of deficiency.”

***The above are policy principles in relation to wildlife conservation. It is proposed that, subject to the outcome of public consultation and as part of the environmental appraisal of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), these principles are further developed as policies, and incorporated into the UDP as part of the first review. In the meantime, the City Council will develop a Supplementary Planning Guidance note on nature conservation. This will then be used when considering planning applications.***



## 2

## LOCAL AUTHORITY ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES

These policies mostly concern the way the Council manages its own resources such as parks and open space, and seek to ensure that these are managed effectively and sympathetically for wildlife.

- 2.1 Many of the City's parks and open spaces are intensively managed at present and support a limited number of familiar wildlife species. With small changes in the management of certain sites, the ecological value of such areas could significantly increase. The Council is mindful that in some instances there is a need to manage certain populations, such as pigeons, starlings, rats and cockroaches.

The Council will continue to promote nature conservation and sustainable practice in the management of its own land where appropriate and in balance with other landscape and heritage priorities. Priority will be given to areas of deficiency and the provision of those habitats or features which are scarce or vulnerable in the city. In planting schemes, the Council will seek to use locally native species, or where appropriate, non-natives with a proven value for wildlife. The Council will undertake the production of management plans or specifications for important areas and the establishment of ecological landscape design and management techniques in appropriate departments.

- 2.2 Parks staff already receive training in certain aspects of ecological management, but it is important that they are kept fully up to date on current thinking on integrating wildlife and urban parks, and sustainable land management practices.

The adoption of the nature conservation strategy will necessitate a degree of training in various new skills and ideas relating to nature conservation and sustainable land management. Such a training programme will be pursued by the Council.

- 2.3 The Council recognises the need to constantly manage and review its ecological database so as to measure the success of policies and schemes for conserving and promoting wildlife.

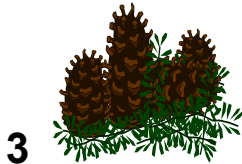
The Council will actively support the upkeep of its ecological database and will monitor future changes. It will encourage other landowners and land managers in the City to contribute to these databases as appropriate. It will establish targets for action, and monitor the success of policies and schemes for conserving and promoting wildlife in Westminster, reviewing progress at regular intervals and modifying policies and proposals as appropriate.

- 2.4 The Council has the power to set up and manage Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) under Section 21 of the 1949 'National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act', and will consider the feasibility of such designations in the future.

The Council will seek to declare Local Nature Reserves on suitable sites of wildlife interest.

- 2.5 The Council recognises the importance of education to help people to understand, appreciate and value the natural environment locally, and to increase awareness of environmental problems on a wider scale. A major facility for providing direct experience of nature and the outdoor environment is offered by the lookout centre in Hyde Park, run by the friends of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. Encouraging children to be involved with wildlife and nature conservation is particularly important if they are to grow up with an awareness of the environment and a respect for the quality of life for future generations.

The Council will promote environmental education by ensuring that all schools and local people have access to areas for appreciating and studying the natural environment, and by encouraging nature conservation in the curricula of schools, colleges and adult education centres, in the context of its work on Local Agenda 21. The development of nature areas in school grounds and housing areas will be encouraged.



### 3

## PROMOTIONAL POLICIES

The Council has a key role in informing and influencing others about nature conservation. This is particularly important in Westminster where open spaces have a high public profile and where many of the valuable wildlife sites are outside Council ownership. The concept of partnership will be crucial to the success of the strategy, involving both local communities and major landowners.

- 3.1 Involving local people in wildlife issues fosters greater understanding, enjoyment and protection of the wildlife resource. It is important that any improvements to existing open spaces are carried out with the support of local users.

The Council will encourage local community groups, schools and the general public to become involved in nature conservation, and will, where appropriate, liaise with them when considering management or habitat creation schemes for individual sites. The Council will also seek to raise public awareness of issues relevant to the care of local wildlife.

- 3.2 To succeed with its nature conservation strategy, the Council will seek partnerships with the private and voluntary sectors. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, many of the larger open spaces in the City, containing much of its wildlife habitat, are privately owned and managed, and there is a considerable wildlife resource contained within individual household gardens. Secondly, the City has considerable potential in its thriving business community and local amenity groups to assist in enhancing and extending its wildlife resource.

The Council will seek to work in partnership with other landowners, residents, schools, the business community, the police and the voluntary sector to conserve and enhance the nature conservation resource in Westminster.

- 3.3 The voluntary nature conservation sector is an important source of information in London and provides a focus for work with local communities, particularly in relation to the management of wildlife sites and habitats.

The Council will continue to work with local wildlife groups and seek to provide further support for their activities where appropriate.

- 3.4 The success of the strategy in involving local people and fostering goodwill towards the natural environment in the City depends, in some measure, on good publicity and information.

The Council will continue to publicise and promote nature conservation through a variety of interpretative methods to all sectors of the community.