TACKLING THE ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

CREATING SPACE FOR NATURE IN CAMDEN

camden.gov.uk/wildlife-areas

we make Camden

Camden

FOREWORD

This biodiversity strategy for Camden sets out our ambition to defend and extend biodiversity in the borough – and to do our bit to assist in protecting nature more widely.

The climate and ecological crisis is the most serious threat our planet, its people, and all forms of life have ever faced. The 'sixth mass extinction' event, which we are currently living through, has seen the decline and loss of many species and habitats. In 2019 Camden Council declared a climate and ecological emergency and committed to taking action to do all we can to halt and reverse these dangerous trends. This is more important, and more urgent, than it has ever been.

The climate and ecological emergencies are inseparable – tackling them together is central to creating a more sustainable and healthier place for us all. This strategy sits alongside Camden's Climate Action Plan as part of our collective response. It forms the fourth document of its type written by the Council to help build a better, more hopeful future.

Camden is an ecologically diverse borough, home to many species and types of environment. In 2019 Camden was recognised as having one of the top ten highest tree canopy covers in the country; thanks to the interest and work of our community in studying them, we have one of the best understandings of hedgehogs – a creature on the Red List for British Mammals; and we are lucky to host some important landscapes.

The coronavirus pandemic has had global impact and will leave a long-lasting imprint on society and how we live. In amongst the grief and anxiety has been the respite and engagement with the outdoors experienced by many of us. Access to nature has played a special role this last year, which has only added to the recognised value and importance that nature plays for the health of us as individuals and as a society.

This strategy, developed during the pandemic, lays out a strong foundation for helping nature in Camden, and increasing people's access for the benefit of their health and wellbeing.

I hope you can share our aspiration and play a part in creating a space for nature in your community and life.

Adam Harrison
Cabinet member for a sustainable Camden

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE VISION

> The London Borough of Camden is a place where nature thrives, a place where wildlife can make a home in our green spaces, gardens, streets, and on buildings; and where it moves freely along corridors and stepping stones of habitats through the borough and beyond. Camden must be a place where nature is part of the everyday lives of residents, visitors and workers, where development increases rather than harms biodiversity, and where everybody is cooperating to nurture healthy ecosystems and increase the quality of life for all.

ON THE 7TH OCTOBER 2019 CAMDEN COUNCIL DECLARED A CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY. AS PART OF THAT DECLARATION, THE COUNCIL COMMITTED TO "...PRODUCE A NEW ECOLOGICAL PLAN FOR CAMDEN TO SUSTAIN AND IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY IN CAMDEN..." AND TO ENCOURAGE "...ALL CITIZENS, BUSINESSES, AND ORGANISATIONS OR GROUPS IN THE BOROUGH OF CAMDEN TO JOIN WITH THE COUNCIL TO...PROTECT AND IMPROVE BIODIVERSITY, IN ORDER TO AVERT IMPENDING CATASTROPHE."

This Strategy is the first part of that ecological plan. We are further committed to achieving the vision and objectives set out here, both via our own actions and by working with and supporting the activities of others. We recognise the value of biodiversity and the value of natural areas and green spaces for biodiversity, and we will continue to look for opportunities to increase these where we are able, and advocate for it where we are not.

The Council will ensure that all its officers are aware of the need to consider biodiversity wherever it is consistent with the performance of their duties, and those officers for whom it is relevant will be provided with the necessary information and training. Owing to the potential links between the products and materials bought and used by the Council and our contractors and impacts on biodiversity we will also have regard to biodiversity conservation in our procurement processes.

Owing to funding cuts from central government, the council has been forced to reduce its budget by £169 million since 2010, with a further estimated £35-40 million set to be cut from our annual budget. Meeting the needs of people – homes, jobs, and a safe environment – can also put pressure on nature. But people also need nature, and the council remains ambitious on behalf of and alongside our residents. By making informed decisions and directing our resources where they will be most effective we will continue to protect and enhance biodiversity to the best of our ability.

This is not an entirely new area of work; Camden's previous Biodiversity Action Plan[1], which ran from 2013 to 2018, was the Council's third, and many of the actions within that plan have continued since then as part of an ongoing programme of work to benefit wildlife and people. Not all the tasks we set ourselves in the previous Action

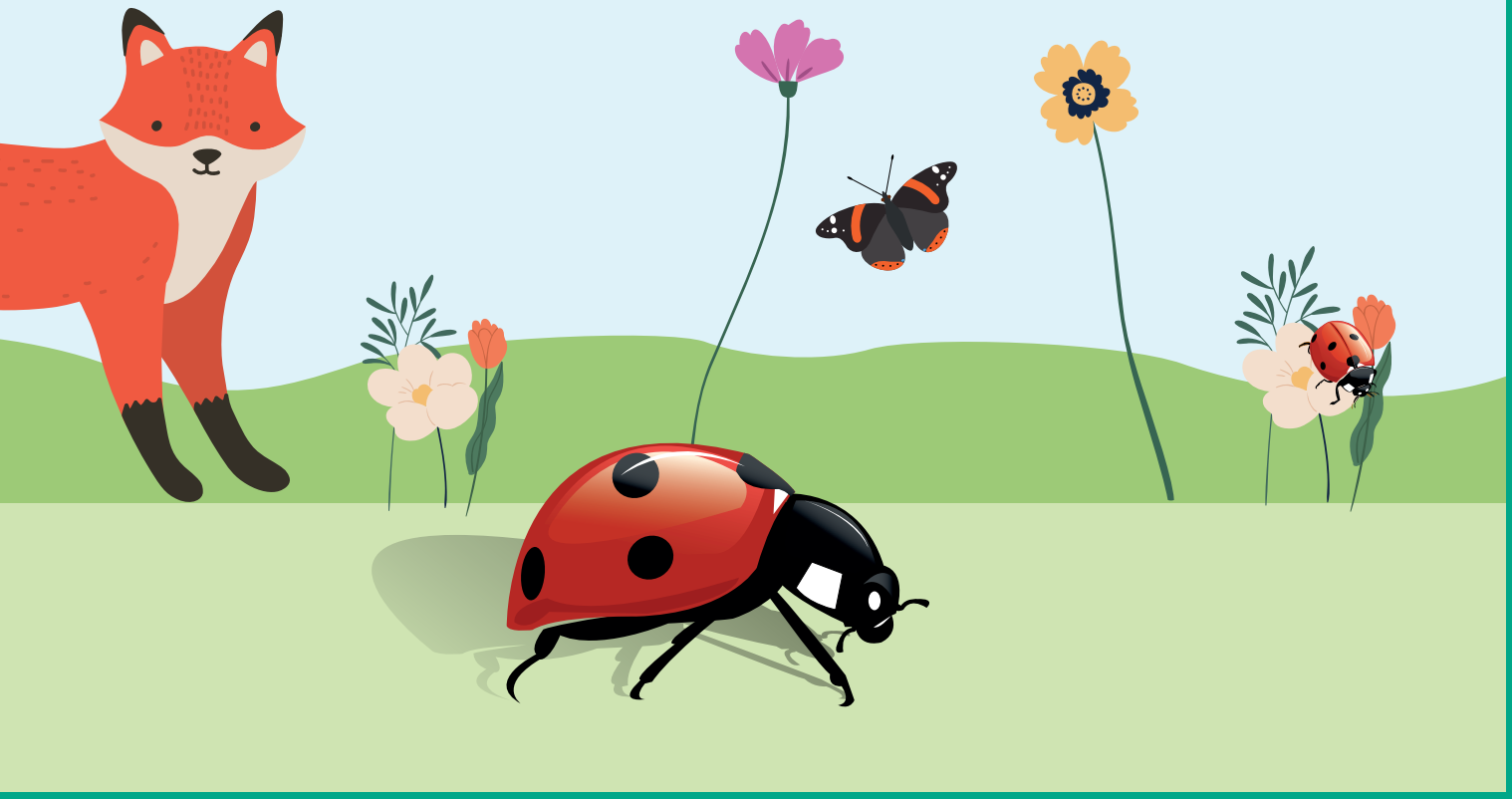
Case Study

Parks for Health

Parks for Health is a major two-year joint initiative between Camden and Islington councils to transform the parks and green space for current and future generations. Its vision is for parks to be inclusive, attractive and accessible for all, and have a central role in increasing physical activity levels, improving mental health and wellbeing, increasing social cohesion and reducing social isolation and loneliness.

Plan were achieved; some of them are challenging, particularly finding ways to provide more natural spaces and reducing the inequality in access, and are going to take longer than we had hoped. These are part of the new Plan, and we will need to find new ways of working and new resources.

The threats to wildlife and habitats have not gone away. While some, like air pollution, have reduced in part thanks to strong leadership by the council and mayor of London, many are ever present. Helping nature cope with climate change and habitat fragmentation in particular is an ever more urgent duty. Doing so while making the most of the benefits that access to nature can bring, and doing so sustainably, is the challenge we are facing up to.



FACT BANK:

WHAT IS 'BIODIVERSITY'?

The word biodiversity refers to the variety and abundance of living things, from the smallest of soil organisms to the largest trees, from ocean plankton to whales. It encompasses everything from genetic differences within a species – the different colour forms of 2-spot ladybirds, for example – to communities of species interacting within and between habitats.

The biodiversity of Camden may only be a small fraction of worldwide biodiversity, but it is nevertheless diverse, vibrant and important. From Hampstead Heath in the north of the Borough to tree-lined squares in the south, the Regent's Canal running through the centre, and street trees, railway embankments, nature reserves, parks, gardens and ponds – every part of Camden has its own character and associated wildlife. In this document, we use the words 'biodiversity' and 'nature' interchangeably, and intend it to mean those species that are or should be present in the Borough and that contribute positively to ecosystems and the environment.

WHY WE NEED NATURE

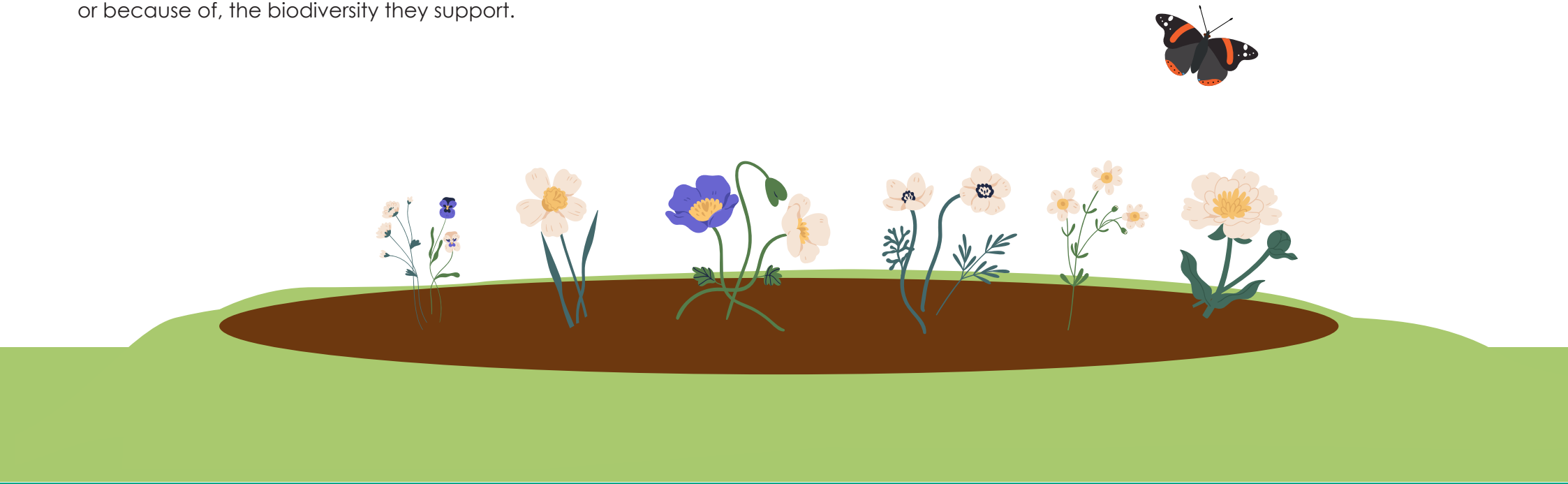
Nature not only has an intrinsic value, but it also contributes positively to our lives in many essential and desirable ways. These benefits are sometimes called 'ecosystem services' and include not just those things we need and take directly from the natural environment like food, building materials and medicines, but also many less tangible but important, complex and interconnected 'services'.

Many of the spaces or features that support ecosystem services can be considered part of our 'green infrastructure' (or 'green-blue infrastructure' where it includes water). These are multi-functional green spaces or green features which can deliver quality of life and environmental benefits alongside, or because of, the biodiversity they support.

Case Study

Gardens for all

A response to the public health crisis caused by the pandemic and lockdown, the 'Gardens for All' project was partnership between Public Health, Camden's Children's Integrated Commissioning, Events and Green Spaces, providing access to Nature Reserves to overcrowded families, and professionals for walk and talk therapy sessions.



FACT BANK:

ECOSYSTEMS:

The interaction between living things (plants, animals, fungi, bacteria) and their environment (climate, water, soil)

ECOLOGY:

The study of ecosystems, the interactions among living things and their environment

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES:

…are the benefits provided by ecosystems that contribute to making human life both possible and worth living.

Provisioning services: The products obtained from ecosystems.

For example: food; building materials like wood; medicines obtained from plants; and fresh water

Regulating services: The benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes.

For example: pollination; urban cooling and noise reduction by vegetation; and regulation of water, air and soil quality

Supporting services: Ecosystem services that are necessary for the production of all other ecosystem services.

For example: soil formation; nutrient cycling; water cycling; primary production (the production of nutrients from sunlight and carbon dioxide by plants and algae)

Cultural services: The non-material benefits people obtain from ecosystems.

For example: through spiritual or religious enrichment, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism, aesthetic experience - enjoying nature and natural spaces!

HOW THIS STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

The starting point for this strategy was the previous Biodiversity Action Plan. The key themes in that document were reviewed and expanded where necessary during the development of this new strategy. Some of the ongoing actions from that plan will be rolled over into the new Action Plan. The council reviewed current national and London policy and strategy to ensure this strategy complements them. It held workshops and conversations with partners to further develop some of the background information and objectives, and to ensure the strategy complements other Council strategies and those of our partners.

A public consultation on biodiversity took place in summer 2020, and the themes emerging from that consultation informed the first draft of this document. A public consultation on that draft ran from March to May 2021 and the document was revised in response. The more detailed and location-specific responses received through both the consultations are and will feed into the development of the Action Plan and Nature Recovery Network.

THE BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY IN ONE PARAGRAPH

We will achieve the Vision and Objectives set out here by establishing a **local Nature Recovery Network** and a new **Action Plan**, which will be developed and delivered by working with organisations across the Borough in a **Camden Nature Partnership**. Our decisions will be **evidence-based**, **plan for a changing climate**, and involve **communication and engagement** with, and the **participation** of, the citizens and communities of Camden.

Case Study

Camden outdoor learning sites

Camden's nature reserves and green spaces provide a rich environment for outdoor learning. A number of our nature reserves, open to the public at weekends, are available to schools and childcare settings for self-led activities during the week. **https://www.camden.gov.uk/wildlife-areas**

THE BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

THE BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

A NATURE RECOVERY NETWORK FOR CAMDEN

It is not enough merely to protect pockets of wildlife habitats. Many of these are too small to maintain populations, and wildlife within them remains vulnerable to chance events and a changing climate. Wildlife needs to be able to move to respond to both local events and climate change, so that it can colonise new areas, find food, shelter and a mate. The 2010 Lawton Review, entitled Making Space for Nature[2], reviewed England's wildlife sites and ecological networks, making a number of recommendations, including for properly planned networks and improving the protection and management of existing wildlife sites. We need to give nature better and more places to go, and new ways to get there, if it is to recover from decades of decline.

This will mean creating and maintaining stepping stones and corridors of habitat through the Borough, and improving and expanding existing ones, as well as looking after what we've already got. It also means trying to make those areas that are the most hostile to nature – the most urban of areas with little food or shelter – more wildlife friendly by 'greening the grey'.

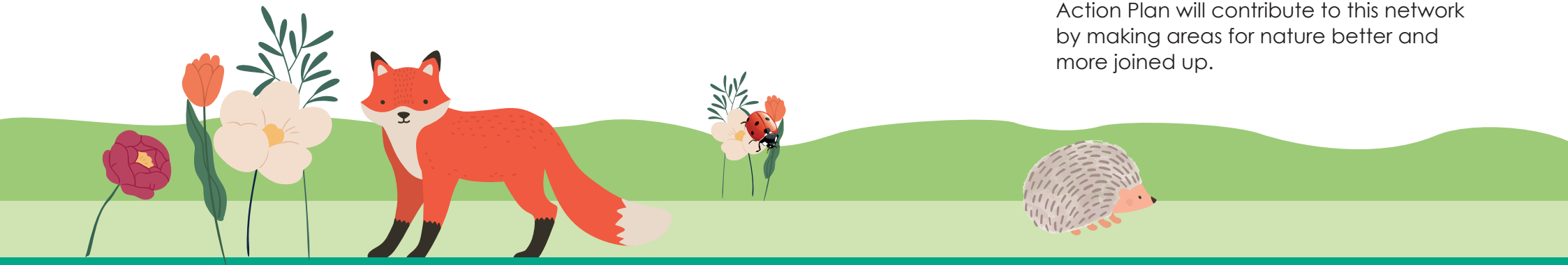
That is why, alongside an Action Plan, we will develop a Nature Recovery Network for Camden. This will provide a spatial framework for achieving our vision and objectives. It will not just inform our priorities but also give a broader ecological context for the actions the Council, other organisations and individuals are taking. It will acknowledge existing nature sites as core elements and look for both existing and potential connections between these sites.

By recognising that nature needs a network, we can make the most informed decisions regarding what to do for nature, and importantly prioritise where it should be done to have the greatest benefit.

That is not to say that it is only within this network that actions will benefit nature; we will also need to buffer the network and provide smaller scale connections to bring nature to all parts of the Borough.

Failure to create, maintain, improve and expand opportunities for wildlife will not only impact Camden's wildlife but those of neighbouring boroughs, the whole of London, and potentially wider for those species that migrate through the area. This is also why we must advocate for wildlife outside of the Borough, and work with our neighbours to ensure connections are maintained across authority boundaries.

The council will publish a Nature Recovery Network Map, which will show the core of the network, and existing and potential stepping stones and corridors. This map will evolve as we review and expand our knowledge of Camden's nature and progress the Action Plan. It will respond to and reflect any guidance or regulation provided at a London or national level. The thematic areas of activity and objectives that will provide the framework for the Action Plan will contribute to this network by making areas for nature better and more joined up.



AN ACTION PLAN

The core of this strategy and key to delivering a Nature Recovery Network and achieving our vision and objectives will be an Action Plan. As with the previous Biodiversity Action Plan, it will be developed and delivered alongside many other organisations working in the Borough. Many of these organisations are already doing great things for nature.

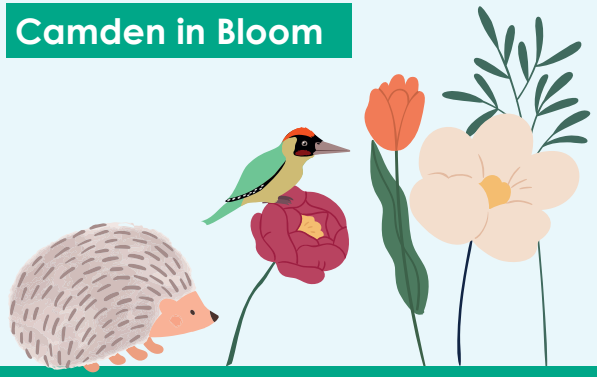
The Council's actions will be informed by the vision and objectives of the biodiversity strategy, as well as public consultation. Not only will the Action Plan set out what the Council will be doing to achieve the objectives and vision, it will also communicate actions being undertaken by other organisations in the Borough, and act as a resource for all.

Developing and delivering actions will be an ongoing process. The Action Plan will be a live document updated regularly to include any new projects that emerge and update ongoing actions, either annually for ongoing actions or at a frequency appropriate to a project's timetable. The initial Action Plan will be launched alongside this document.

While reporting on the achievements of the activities and projects in the Action Plan will be an ongoing process, progress made against the objectives will be assessed every five years. This will involve measuring the achievements of the Action Plan against losses from external factors or unforeseen events. This will identify any gaps in both the Action Plan and the overall strategy, seeking to identify new actions to fill those gaps or revise and expand the objectives as necessary.

Case Study

Camden in Bloom



Camden in Bloom is an annual competition that aims to encourage residents, businesses and community groups to take pride in their neighbourhood and create a more pleasant place to live and work through gardening, covering everything from window boxes to community gardens, and vegetables to wildflowers.

https://www.camden.gov.uk/camden-in-bloom

A CAMDEN NATURE PARTNERSHIP

No one person or organisation can solve the ecological crisis, and helping nature recover in Camden is going to take all of us doing what we can; a diversity of individuals, organisations and businesses bringing their knowledge, skills and resources together.

Camden's previous Biodiversity Action Plan was developed and delivered by many such organisations working together, and the Council will continue to work with those partners, and new ones, to develop our Action Plan and Nature Recovery Network, in the Camden Nature Partnership.

Camden Council is grateful to the following organisations for their support in the development of this strategy and the promotion of the public consultations. We look forward to continuing to work with them and others, and the citizens of the borough, into the future.

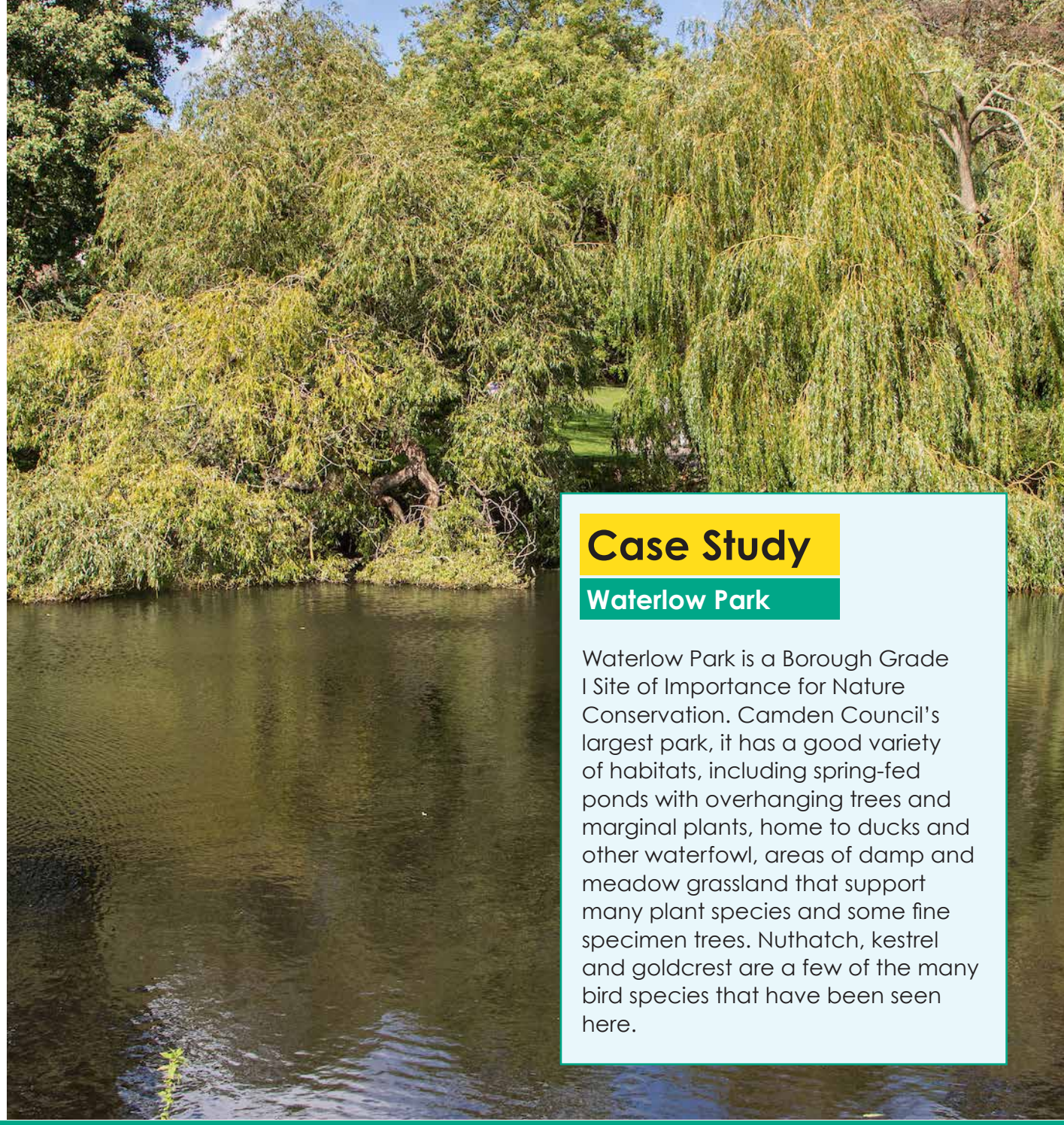
London Wildlife Trust, City of London Corporation (Hampstead Heath), The Royal Parks, Froglife, Canal & Rivers Trust, the Institute of Zoology at the Zoological Society of London, Wild Bloomsbury (University of London & University College London), Greenspace Information for Greater London, Camden Nature Reserves Forum, Camden Climate Change Alliance, Climate Emergency Camden, Heath Hands, Voluntary Action Camden, Central District Alliance, Fitzrovia Partnership, Camden Town Unlimited, Euston Town, Kings Cross Central Limited Partnership, Wild West End, Global Generation.

The role of the Camden Nature Partnership will be to:

- Inform the development of the Action Plan and Nature Recovery Network
- Communicate actions, share information and best practice between partners
- Provide support and identify potential joint working opportunities
- Advise the Council
- Advocate shared objectives to a wider audience
- Camden Council will provide the secretariat for the Partnership and seek funding to expand its work.

EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING

In developing the Action Plan and Nature Recovery Network, and in making decisions that have the potential to impact upon biodiversity, we will use the best information and evidence available to us. There are some gaps in our knowledge, particularly around the extent and quality of important habitats and the status of many of our species, so we will work with experts to improve the quality and extent of environmental information available to us. We will commission surveys, and work with partners to support wildlife recording and encourage, promote and develop citizen science projects.



Case Study

Waterlow Park

Waterlow Park is a Borough Grade I Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. Camden Council's largest park, it has a good variety of habitats, including spring-fed ponds with overhanging trees and marginal plants, home to ducks and other waterfowl, areas of damp and meadow grassland that support many plant species and some fine specimen trees. Nuthatch, kestrel and goldcrest are a few of the many bird species that have been seen here.

PLANNING FOR A CHANGING CLIMATE

Camden Council launched a Climate Action Plan in July 2020, the first of two five-year plans towards a net zero carbon Camden by 2030[3]. These actions, by us and others, are vital if we are to reduce the scale of predicted potential climate change, but change is happening already, and will continue. Taking those changes into account, and resulting changes in biodiversity, will be essential when planning what we are doing. Future proofing our plans against climate change will give us the best chance of conserving current and future biodiversity.

COMMUNICATION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The development and delivery of this Biodiversity Strategy, including the Action Plan and Nature Recovery Network, will be accompanied by ongoing communication and engagement. We will engage through existing and new channels of communication and with existing and new groups working to help nature in the borough. We want every citizen of Camden to be an advocate for the natural world, to have opportunities to be involved in improving our habitats and species, and to have the confidence and knowledge to take action themselves. The Action Plan will recognise work being done by the community, and the Council will encourage, and endeavour to support, individuals, communities and organisations who wish to help nature to the best of our ability.

THE OBJECTIVES

DESIGNATED SITES

Objective:

Protect, maintain and enhance Camden's designated sites, make the network more resilient by buffering sites and improving habitat connections between them, and increase the proportion of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation managed for biodiversity.

Places designated for their wildlife value are at the core of nature's recovery; refuges from where wildlife can expand out into surrounding areas, given the chance.

SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are the country's best wildlife and geological sites. Hampstead Heath Woods SSSI, part of the Kenwood Estate managed by English Heritage, is the only SSSI in Camden. SSSI is a statutory designation, and these sites receive a strong level of protection through legislation.

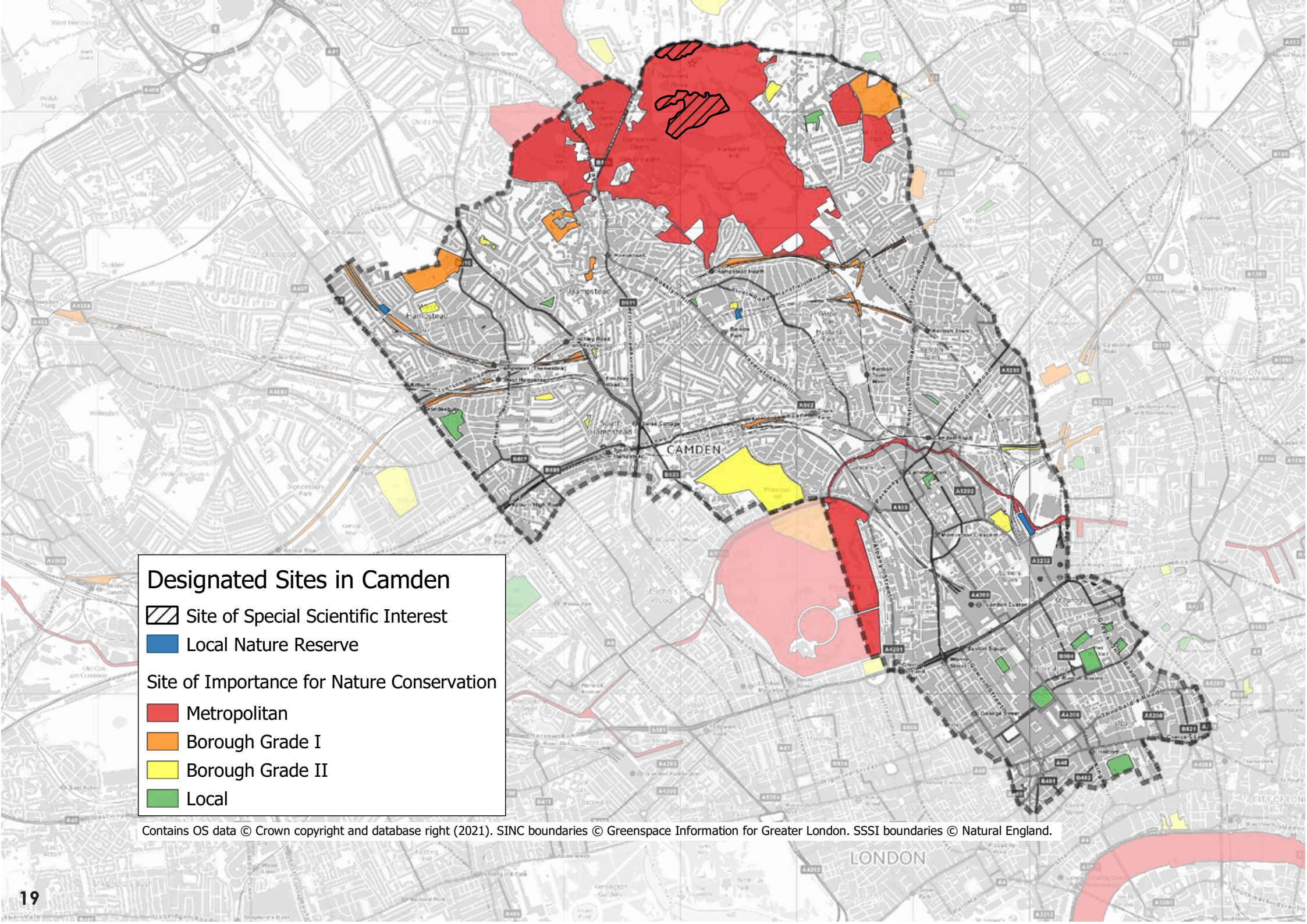
SITE OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

A Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) is an area that is considered important for its biodiversity value at a London, borough or local level. Designations are declared by the local authority in conjunction with the London Wildlife Sites Board. It is a non-statutory designation, meaning such sites have no protection in law – however, in Camden they are afforded some protection from development through the planning process through policies in the Local Plan[5].

SINC grade	Area (hectares) [4]
Metropolitan	322.7
Borough I	40.4
Borough II	32.8
Local	17.9

There are a number of 'grades' of SINC designation, reflecting the scale of importance of the area, from Metropolitan for sites important for London, including Hampstead Heath and the Regent's Canal, to those important at a Local level, with a couple of grades for sites important at a Borough level in between.

Camden has 38 areas designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, covering almost 414 hectares. Some of these are managed by the Council, the rest owned by various organisations, most notably the City of London Corporation, the Royal Parks and Network Rail. These SINCs form the core of Camden's wildlife network and their protection, enhancement and connectivity to surrounding habitat is a priority. In addition to SINCs within the Borough, Camden co-owns St Pancras & Islington Cemetery, in the London Borough of Barnet. As part of the Action Plan the Council will update existing SINC designations and assess new sites for potential designation.



LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are sites that are important for wildlife and provide local communities with opportunities to access and engage with nature. They are designated by local authorities, in consultation with Natural England, and as a statutory designation they are afforded some protection through legislation and planning policy. There are four LNRs in Camden: Adelaide, Belsize Wood, Westbere Copse, and Camley Street Natural Park. As part of the Action Plan the Council will investigate any additional sites that may be suitable for designation as a Local Nature Reserve.

Case Study

Acid Grassland at Hampstead Heath

Acid grassland develops on free-draining, low-nutrient acidic soils and is a rare habitat, and in Camden is found on the sandy soils at **Hampstead Heath**. Here it is looked after by the City of London and Heath Hands as part of a mosaic of habitats important to wildlife

HABITATS

Objective:

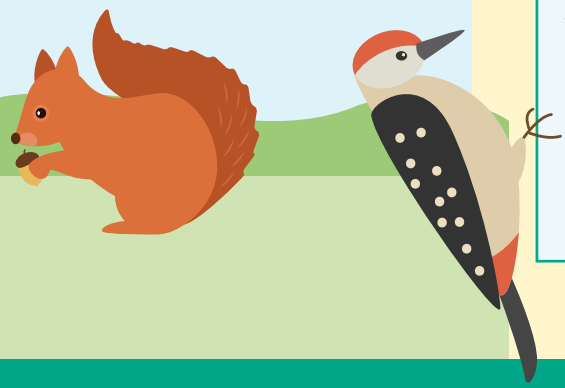
Protect, maintain and improve priority habitats and increase the area of species-rich grassland, woodland and reedbed.

There are many different types of habitat across the Borough, from the neatly mown amenity grassland of our parks to the ancient Ken Wood, from the Regent's Canal to the spring-fed wet grassland flushes at Waterlow Park, and from small private gardens to extensive green roofs on office blocks.

Priority Habitat	Area (ha) in 2014
Woodland (native broadleaved)	109.8ha
Meadows and pastures	69.7ha
Standing water (including canals)	18.9ha
Acid grassland	14.2ha
Reedbed	3.6ha
Heathland	1.2ha
Rivers and streams	0.02ha
Orchards	Unknown

Amenity grassland is the most prevalent habitat and is widely distributed across Camden. While it has limited value for wildlife it does offer significant scope for improvement where this does not conflict with other needs – something the Council has been actively pursuing. Woodland is the second commonest habitat and supports a wide range of wildlife, mainly in the north of the borough or along railway embankments.

There are several habitats in Camden that have declined nationally and are of principal importance[6] for nature conservation. This includes woodland, neutral grassland, acid grassland, reedbeds, heathland, and ponds and canals. The information we have regarding the area of priority habitat in the borough is from 2014. One of our first tasks will be to find a way to update this and assess its quality. This will also allow us to find ways to buffer or increase these areas.



Case Study

Westbere Copse Local Nature Reserve

Westbere Copse Local Nature Reserve, part of a larger Grade 1 SINC, includes an area of public open space and the Jenny Wood Nature Reserve, which is used as an outdoor classroom by local schools during the week and is open to the public at weekends. Though small, it is an important site for wildlife, having benefited from decades of regular conservation management by the Westbere Copse Association, West Hampstead Green Gym and numerous corporate and volunteer groups. It includes areas of woodland, Spring and Summer meadows, and a pond with newts, frogs and toads. The wildlife has been well-studied by the volunteers, with over 160 species of insects including numerous beetles, bees and hoverflies recorded, as well as over 30 bird species. Flora includes over 160 flowering plant species and over 70 tree and shrub species.

SPECIES

Objective:

Protect, monitor and increase populations of key priority species through conservation action.

A diverse range of species have been recorded in Camden. This includes common and resident species, like blackbirds, recorded over 1,300 times since 1976, to species that have only been recorded once or a few times, which may be rare in the Borough, or hard to find, or both.

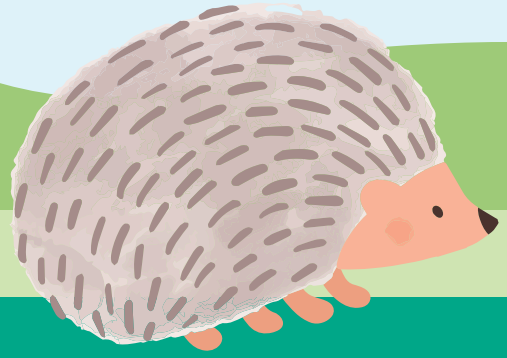
Some of these species have declined nationally to such an extent that they are considered of principal importance for nature conservation in England. Over 60 of these national priorities have been recorded in Camden, including house sparrows (60% decline in 40 years), toads (68% decline in 30 years), hedgehogs (46% population decline), and stag beetles. Additional species have been identified not as national priorities but of conservation concern for London, and over a dozen such have been recorded in Camden. These include bats like common pipistrelles and Daubenton's bats and birds including dunnocks, peregrines, black redstarts and song thrushes.

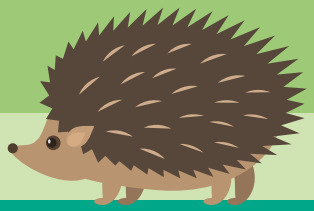
While species are well monitored at a few sites, and a few species are surveyed at larger scales, our knowledge of how well many species are doing across Camden is lacking. Looking at the data we have shows a mixed picture, with some species records increasing and other decreasing. This just shows us how frequently a species is recorded, however, not how it is doing. Hedgehog records have increased hugely for example, but this is almost certainly due to increased survey effort in recent years. Some species have not been recorded at all in the last ten years, but it may be that no one has looked for them in the right place or with the right survey method. One of our first actions will be to review the current state of our knowledge so we can try and fill these gaps, find out which additional species may need our help and how, and work out ways of monitoring them effectively.

Case Study

Hedgehogs

Camden supports an important population of hedgehogs, a species that has declined by a third in urban areas, even more in rural areas, and is now classified as Vulnerable (to extinction). Gardens and parks – and the connections between them – are vital for this species, particularly Hampstead Heath and The Regent's Park, which support the core of Camden's population. A number of organisations and community groups are working to help hedgehogs, including: London Hogwatch (Zoological Society of London) with whom the Council has been working to survey some of our green spaces; University of London; The Conservation Volunteers; and the North West London Urban Hedgehog Reintroduction Programme.





TREES

Objective:

Increase tree canopy cover and promote tree species diversity. Make planting decisions that are informed by their potential to support wildlife, and resist the loss of ancient and veteran trees.

Camden Council is responsible for the management of approximately 28,000 trees and a further 10-15,000 in woodland sites, made up of over 250 species. These trees together with those in others' ownership comprise Camden's urban forest, the canopy of which is estimated to cover 22.9% of the borough[7].

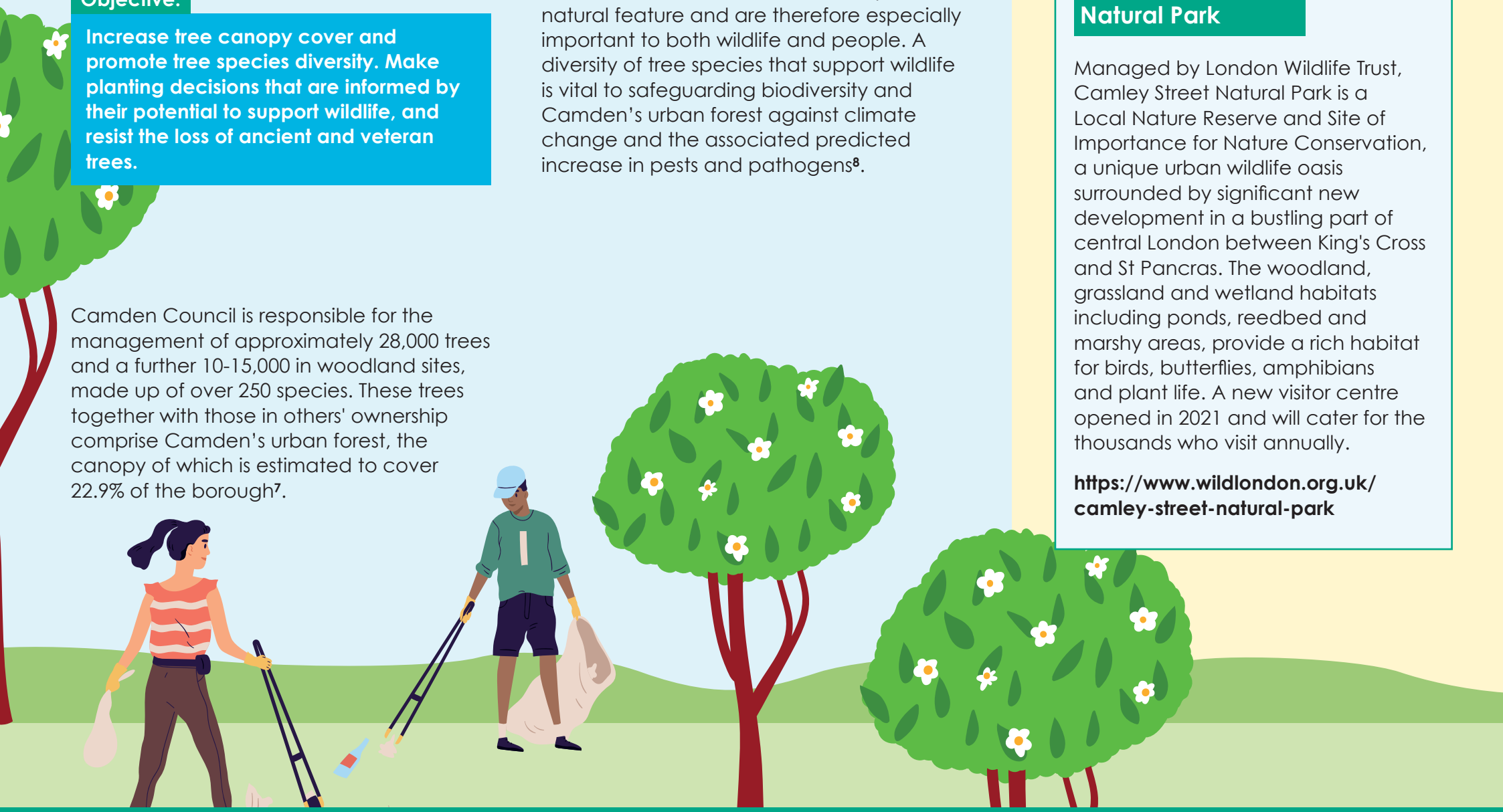
As well as contributing directly to biodiversity trees can support many other species through the provision of food and shelter. In many of the Borough's most urban areas trees are often the only visible natural feature and are therefore especially important to both wildlife and people. A diversity of tree species that support wildlife is vital to safeguarding biodiversity and Camden's urban forest against climate change and the associated predicted increase in pests and pathogens[8].

Case Study

Camley Street Natural Park

Managed by London Wildlife Trust, Camley Street Natural Park is a Local Nature Reserve and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, a unique urban wildlife oasis surrounded by significant new development in a bustling part of central London between King's Cross and St Pancras. The woodland, grassland and wetland habitats including ponds, reedbed and marshy areas, provide a rich habitat for birds, butterflies, amphibians and plant life. A new visitor centre opened in 2021 and will cater for the thousands who visit annually.

https://www.wildlondon.org.uk/camley-street-natural-park



The vision for Camden Council's Tree Planting Strategy is "… to create a resilient urban forest throughout the borough, seizing all opportunities available to maintain and expand canopy cover provided by a diverse population of trees", reflected in its goals to: increase tree canopy cover; promote species diversity; and maximise the benefits of trees (to people and wildlife). The Council will not be able to achieve these objectives alone, which is why we will work with private landowners, businesses and developers – directly and through the planning process – and other organisations and members of the public.

ANCIENT AND VETERAN TREES

Ancient and veteran trees can be particularly important for nature: hollow trunks, rot holes, dead wood, sap runs, loose bark and other features, developed over a long life or from natural damage or management, can support wildlife from fungi to beetles to birds. The trees themselves can also be characterful or aesthetically pleasing to people. Hampstead Heath is a great area for veteran trees, though they can be found in parks across the Borough.

Case Study

Community Gardens in Camden

Calthorpe Community Garden exists to improve the physical and emotional well-being of those who live, work or study in Camden and surrounding areas. They provide a horticultural volunteering and training programme for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues, sustainable food growing incorporating a closed loop food cycle, vegetarian cafe and waste recycling facility, and activities for young people and their families. It is also a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. **http://calthorpecommunitygarden.org.uk/**

Castlehaven Community Park sits at the heart of the community, dedicated to providing a natural and beautiful space for families to grow, play and learn, where people relax or exercise. They provide engaging and educational workshops through a Horticultural Hub and encourage the local community to get fit and active with our regular gardening sessions. **https://www.castlehaven.org.uk/projects/castlehaven-community-park**

The Phoenix Garden is a community garden and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation nestled in the heart of the West End. It provides a green retreat from the stresses of the city and a valuable habitat for wildlife. **https://www.thephoenixgarden.org/**

PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

Objective:

Manage Camden's parks and green spaces to maximise opportunities for space for nature alongside space for people, and continue to provide an increase in inclusive and welcoming areas for people to enjoy wildlife and for wildlife to thrive.

Much of the character of the London Borough of Camden comes from its parks and green spaces, from the tree-lined squares in the south, to the wide open space of Hampstead Heath in the north. These areas are extremely important, not just for the wildlife they currently support, but as areas available to all where nature can be experienced.

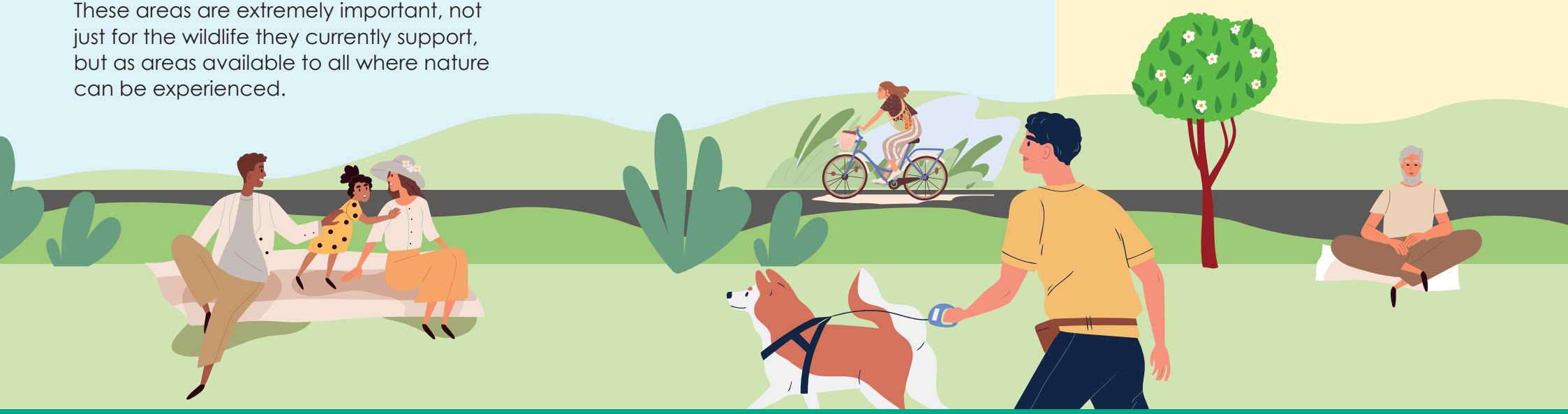
Camden Council manages over 75 parks covering 47 hectares and over 300 housing estates covering over 40 hectares of green space, including a number of green roofs. There are around 100 parks of various size in Camden, covering an area of approximately 400 hectares, though this is not evenly distributed – around two-thirds of this area is Hampstead Heath managed by the City of London Corporation. Other significant areas are managed by The Royal Parks and the Universities. Some of these areas, like the Heath, nature reserves and some of our parks, are rich in wildlife, others less so.

Case Study

Mission: Invertebrate

Mission: Invertebrate is a project being run by the Royal Parks, carrying out invertebrate research, developing habitats across their parks, including The Regent's Park and Primrose Hill, and providing opportunities for people to learn about invertebrates.

https://www.royalparks.org.uk/get-involved/mission-invertebrate



Camden Council adopts conservation-led management across the green spaces it manages. The intention with conservation led maintenance is to decrease high intensity, high cost maintenance tasks, such as regular grass cutting and adopt a more sustainable, more cost effective biodiversity friendly maintenance approach. These changes enable our green spaces to become more naturalised and help to improve ecological processes, such as pollination. Changes to planting and management are assessed against a 'nature rating', and where practical, high intensity management of grass, hedges, bedding and rose beds is changed to other more sustainable planting and or management techniques that increase biodiversity, such as relaxed grass-mowing regimes, creation of meadow areas, and planting wildlife-friendly species. These decisions are weighed up against site location and suitability, resident input, budgets and other Council objectives, to ensure the best possible outcome for both biodiversity and Camden's residents.

These changes have led to an increase in the area and numbers of features of value to wildlife, such as a greater diversity of grass sward heights and more pollinator friendly planting. This approach has also supported Camden residents and volunteers to get involved with gardening and improving their access to nature.

Since 2017, approximately 18% of frequently cut grass has been changed to relaxed mowing or meadow areas and 20% of Rose beds were changed to more sustainable planting. This approach is ongoing, and has helped to deliver more sustainable and biodiverse green spaces across Camden.

As of January 2021, there are 6 hectares of relaxed mowing and meadow areas across Camden Council managed green spaces and 1.6km of conservation hedgerows.

Parks were planned for people – gardens for the gardenless – recognising that green spaces were good for us, but wildlife has always needed them too, and needs them now more than ever. We must learn to share our spaces with wildlife, making our green spaces more natural and making our lives a bit wilder.

HERBICIDE USE

Camden Council's contractors currently use herbicides on tarmac and paved areas where it is necessary for reasons of health and safety, including keeping surfaces even for people to walk on safely. The council minimises herbicide use as far as possible and has taken numerous steps to reduce it. Camden does not use herbicide to manage amenity weeds in grass or other soft landscaping areas. Camden's green spaces team are currently working on initiatives to design out the need for herbicide use on hard standing through selective choice of surface materials across our sites.

ACCESS TO NATURE

Objective:

Increase opportunities for Camden's residents to experience and learn about the natural environment through volunteering, engagement, access, communication and inclusive and welcoming natural spaces.

While other objectives in this strategy are designed to bring nature to people, we also want to bring people to nature. Access to the natural environment is important not just because of the benefits it can bring to people's health and wellbeing, but also because of the benefits to nature that come from communities and individuals who appreciate, understand, value and look after it.

Experiences of nature can be fleeting and incidental, like hearing birdsong on a walk to the bus stop, or extended and deliberately sought, such as by taking a long walk on Hampstead Heath or watching birds along the Regent's Canal. Allotments, community gardens, city farms and private gardens can also provide areas for people to experience nature. Looking after the natural world also provides opportunities for exercise and socialising via volunteering and community gardening. There are also opportunities, and a role to play, for schools and other education settings, whether that be learning about nature in an outdoor classroom or providing space for nature in and around the school grounds. Alongside increasing biodiversity, a diversity of opportunities for people to experience it will help make nature part of everyone's everyday lives.

Case Study

Wild Bloomsbury

Led by University College London working with the University of London, Wild Bloomsbury is making nature-based interventions to improve wellbeing, increase climate-resilience and reduce pollution, to create healthy and liveable cities. Working with students, staff, local people, organisations and researchers, their goal is to create a vibrant and liveable Bloomsbury by reintroducing nature and make 10,000m² more biodiverse space by 2024 and increase health and wellbeing.

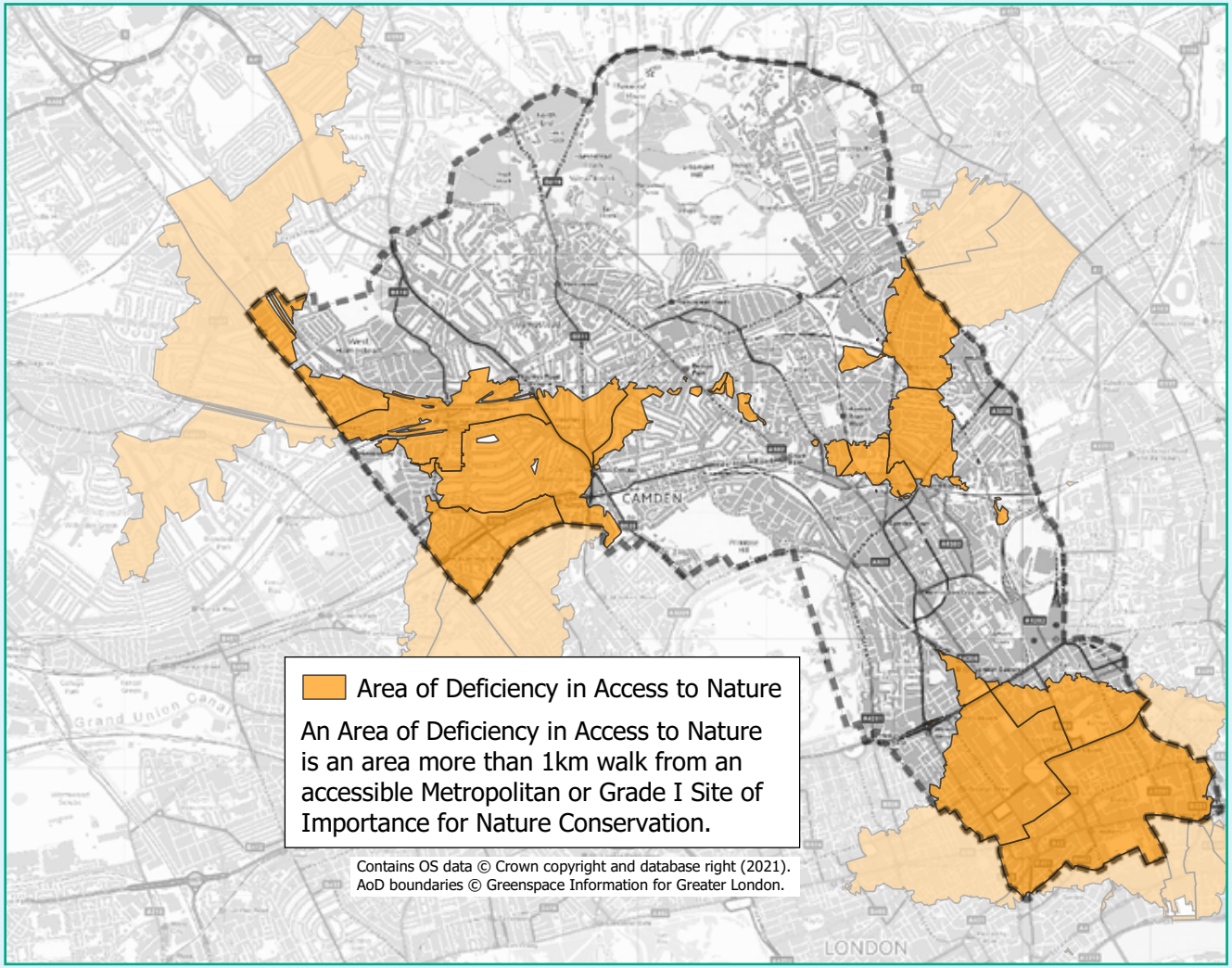
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/sustainable/wild-bloomsbury

AREAS OF DEFICIENCY AND INEQUALITY IN ACCESS

There are areas within Camden where residents lack sufficient access to the natural environment – defined as more than 1km walking distance from a publicly accessible Borough or Metropolitan Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.

We also know that green space access is not just a matter of location, but of inequality. A Government diversity review in 2008 identified disabled people, black and minority ethnic groups and young people as having significantly lower levels of access to nature. These groups represent a significant proportion of Camden's diverse population. More recent surveys, undertaken by Natural England, show a similar pattern with respect to ethnicity[10], and that covid-19 exacerbated existing trends in inequality of access to natural space[11]. Limitations to the reasons for leaving your property disproportionately disadvantaged those without private outdoor space, and for those without local green space avoiding public transport became a further problem.

There is no easy solution to these issues. By making what natural spaces there are more accessible, inclusive and welcoming; making green spaces more natural and grey places more green; providing more opportunities for engagement with the natural world; and, importantly, trying to understand the reasons behind the inequalities in access, we can improve the quality of life through nature for as many people as possible. We will target action where it will have the greatest benefit for areas of socioeconomic deprivation.



GREENING THE GREY

Objective:

Achieve net gain in biodiversity through planning decisions that are supported by policy and guidance, and identify and deliver opportunities to increase biodiversity in urban areas.

While city living has its benefits, the urban environment can negatively affect mental health, with a higher incidence of mood and anxiety disorders in people living in these areas[12]. While not a panacea, spending time in nature has been found to reduce stress[13],[14], so protecting and enhancing nature in urban areas, alongside maintaining and improving access to nature, can be good for both wildlife and people.

Inner-city areas can be difficult for wildlife. Finding food can be a challenge for the insects that would then provide food for larger animals, and nesting sites for birds are few and far between. What wildlife habitat there is, is often concentrated in small areas like parks and green spaces, where competition for space, including with people, will be high. If we are to help wildlife we need to find ways to 'green the grey'. Redevelopment, regeneration and retrofitting of our buildings and public spaces must be made to provide opportunities to do this.

Camden Council has comprehensive planning policies and guidance to protect and enhance nature: Policy A3 of the Local Plan states that 'the Council will protect and enhance sites of nature conservation and Biodiversity…' and '…will protect, and seek to secure additional, trees and vegetation…' , and this is supported by Planning Guidance on biodiversity . It is expected that developers leave areas in a better environmental condition and green spaces and features, such as green roofs, and other features for biodiversity are incorporated into plans. There are now many green roofs across Camden, but rooftop space remains one of the greatest opportunities for nature in the south of the Borough so retrofitting to existing buildings is also needed.

Many of these features will provide additional benefits, and thus contribute to our Green Infrastructure. Green roofs absorb rainwater, reducing the risk of flooding, as well as reduce the energy costs of a building by providing insulation. Sustainable Drainage Systems are also designed to manage water, and where they are at ground level can also be designed to provide biodiversity benefits. Community gardening and food growing in planters in some of these spaces, including on roofs, can provide additional opportunities for people and nature.

Case Study

Camley Street Sustainable Urban Drainage

The southern end of Camley Street has an increased risk of flooding. A Sustainable Drainage System, in the form of a 2m wide, 180m long rain garden, was designed, and installed in 2020. This provides reduced flood risk, reduced reliance on the sewer network, biodiversity enhancement and greater contact with nature for pedestrians.

Regeneration of public space also needs to provide opportunities to include more features for biodiversity. Through street planting, pocket parks and parklets we can provide more space for wildlife and nicer places for people. Transport projects, such as reducing traffic and making changes to junctions are also opportunities for incorporating planting for biodiversity. Achieving these things can have considerable technical challenges – underground services severely limit options for tree planting, for example. We also need to be mindful that design and choice of materials are consistent with achieving sustainable management and procurement, so we do not inadvertently increase our carbon footprint or contribute to biodiversity loss elsewhere. Being mindful of these challenges and working across Council departments with communities and partners to solve them gives us the best chance of sustainable streets for nature and people.

CAMDEN'S NATURAL FUTURE

CAMDEN'S NATURAL FUTURE

We are in the midst of an Ecological Emergency, a 'sixth extinction' that has seen the decline and loss of many of our species and habitats. Taking action to stop and reverse these declines is more important, and more urgent, than it has ever been. This is not just about doing things that help nature, but also about reducing those things that harm it. Even if we did not recognise the intrinsic value of the natural world we must do it for our own sake, or else we risk further damaging those ecosystem services that we are so reliant upon. There is hope. If we all did what we can, even if that was little, we can make a difference.

This strategy sets out the process by which the Council will do what we can, and the objectives that we want to achieve, to help nature's recovery in Camden. It will work alongside several Council policies and strategies, such as the Climate Action Plan, Tree Planting Strategy, Transport Strategy and planning policies, that both contribute to positive action for biodiversity and regulate those activities that harm the environment. We will also work in partnership with and support others – individuals, communities, organisations and businesses – to do what they can to help nature.

In five years, when we make the first review of progress towards the objectives in this strategy, we will be living in a more biodiverse and natural area and be closer to our vision for the London Borough of Camden.

[1] **https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/2205931/Camden+Biodiversity+action+plan.pdf/ab6c69bc-3769-3719-5481-a7fbc22555ce**

[2] Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network (Lawton et al., 2010)

[3] **https://www.camden.gov.uk/climate-crisis**

[4] Produced by Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC on behalf of LB Camden, November 2020

[5] Policy A3 Biodiversity **https://www.camden.gov.uk/local-plan-documents**

[6] Species and habitats of principal importance for nature conservation in England, as set out by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006).

[7] **https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/stories/s/ad58-u6q7**

[8] Stevenson PC, Bidartondo M, Blackhall-Miles R, et al. The state of the world's urban ecosystems: What can we learn from trees, fungi, and bees?. Plants, People, Planet. **2020;2:482–498. https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp3.10143**

[9] **Atkins** (2014) Camden Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study

[10] **https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/culture-and-heritage/visits-to-the-natural-environment/latest#by-ethnicity-and-socio-economic-group-last-7-days**

[11] **https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-adult-data-y1q1-april-june-2020-experimental-statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-adult-data-y1q1-april-june-2020-experimental-statistics**

[12] Peen, J., Schoevers, R. A., Beekman, A. T. & Dekker, J. The current status of urban-rural differences in psychiatric disorders. Acta Psychiatr. Scand. 121, 84–93 (2010) **https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0447.2009.01438.x**

[13] Hedblom, M., Gunnarsson, B., Iravani, B. et al. Reduction of physiological stress by urban green space in a multisensory virtual experiment. Sci Rep 9, 10113 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-46099-7

[14] Hunter M.R., Gillespie B.W., Chen S.Y.-P. (2019) Urban nature experiences reduce stress in the context of daily life based on salivary biomarkers Frontiers in Psychology, 10, art. no. 722 **https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00722**

[15] **https://www.camden.gov.uk/local-plan-documents**

[16] **https://www.camden.gov.uk/camden-planning-guidance**

CONTACT DETAILS

Nature Conservation
Green Spaces
London Borough of Camden
5 Pancras Square
London
N1C 4AG

natureconservation@camden.gov.uk

TACKLING THE ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY