Our reference: MGLA160224-6803

3 April 2024

Dear

Thank you for your request for information which the Greater London Authority (GLA) received on 16 February 2024. Your request has been considered under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004.

You requested:

> Please can I have an email copy of the minutes of the recent "London Wildlife Sites Board Meeting" held June 2023 & Oct or Nov 2023.
>
> If this request should be sent as a FOI / EIR request advise accordingly.

Our response to your request is as follows:

Please find attached the information that the GLA holds within the scope of your request.

Please note that some names of members of staff are exempt from disclosure under Regulation 13 (Personal information) of the EIR. Information that identifies specific employees constitutes as personal data which is defined by Article 4(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to mean any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual. It is considered that disclosure of this information would contravene the first data protection principle under Article 5(1) of GDPR which states that Personal data must be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject

If you have any further questions relating to this matter, please contact me, quoting the reference MGLA160224-6803.

Yours sincerely

Information Governance Officer

If you are unhappy with the way the GLA has handled your request, you may complain using the GLA's FOI complaints and internal review procedure, available at:
https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/governance-and-spending/sharing-our-information/freedom-information

London Wildlife Sites Board
11th December 2023

Chair: [redacted] (GLA)

Minutes: [redacted] (GiGL)

Present: [redacted] (London Wildlife Trust), [redacted] (LB Tower Hamlets), [redacted] (LB Hammersmith & Fulham), [redacted] (LB Richmond upon Thames), [redacted] (LB Waltham Forest), [redacted] (Geodiversity Partnership)

Present for Camden SINC review: [redacted]

Apologies: [redacted] (City of London), [redacted]

Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Clarifications on previous meeting minutes
3. LB Tower Hamlets SINC review
4. LB Camden SINC review
5. LNHS Axiophyte Priority Species List
6. Discussion Topic: Designating sites in London, specifically for taxa
7. AoB

1. Introductions

We are happy to welcome [redacted] from LB Hammersmith & Fulham to the Board.

2. Clarification on previous meeting minutes

The previous meeting was held on the 11th of September 2023.

- LB Newham review: [redacted] asked if there had been any follow up on the action regarding the local site selection panel (to compile a list of those consulted). [redacted] will follow this up and report back to the Board. It was also noted that there are lots of projects ongoing in Newham, e.g. the Royal Docks development, so it would be good to join up communications within and outside of the borough.

- Geodiversity: The action from the previous meeting for GiGL to analyse overlaps between SINCs and RIGs has been done. [redacted] has sent this over to [redacted] to check/update as needed. An action remains to encourage boroughs to include geodiversity in their citations/surveys going forward.

3. LB Tower Hamlets SINC review

It was agreed that the review was succinct and clear with a sound methodology. There was unanimous agreement from the board to approve Tower Hamlet's SINC review.

Summary of discussion/recommendations:

- [redacted] asked if the changes noted to be due to error/missed from the last Local Plan could be rectified now, instead of waiting for Local Plan adoption. [redacted] confirmed that aside from one side, Millwall and West India Dock, the changes were not taken forward from previous reviews so will need to go through the Local Plan process before they can be adopted. Action: GiGL will work with Tower Hamlets to correct the Millwall and West India Dock site.

- It was noted that the maps could be made clearer for the purpose of demarking boundaries and for later inspection as part of the Local Plan process. [redacted] was limited by a lack of GIS software and confirmed that the boundaries will be updated/formalised during the consultation process by the Local Plan team. [redacted] suggested the free GIS software QGIS, which GiGL offers training in.

- The Board were impressed by the Local Site Selection Panel process undertaken for this review. [redacted] reported that there was only one site that raised significant discussion and the panel was being expanded to cover other areas, e.g. net zero carbon partnership.

4. LB Camden SINC review

This review was submitted at an early stage in the Local Plan process (pre-regulation 18) to obtain guidance from the Board. Camden aims to start consultation mid-January 2024 with Regulation 19 planned to start around December 2024.

After an initial discussion, 3 representatives from Camden joined the meeting to answer questions: [redacted].

It was agreed that the review was clear, comprehensive and well put together. There was unanimous agreement from the board to approve Camden's SINC review, with the proviso that they follow the recommendations set out in the summary below in their final report.

Summary of discussion/recommendations:

- The absence of a Local Site Selection Panel in the review was noted by multiple Board members. Camden confirmed that draft citations were sent to Friends Groups as well as the broader Camden Nature forum, while the draft report was also sent to a nominal site selection panel, including Friends Groups and local ecologists (including those from The Royal Parks). The final report should include details of this consultation to confirm this requirement has been met.

- It was highlighted that one of the sites is a green roof (the first of its kind in Camden and the first proposed Borough grade) and that designation of green roofs should be encouraged.

- The review stated that there would be no change to the Areas of Deficiency in Access to Nature (SINC AoD) map, but this might not be the case if there are new or altered Borough grade sites. Camden confirmed that they will request predictive modelling from GiGL when the proposed sites have entered public consultation and have done predictive modelling to show the impact of changes to access with GiGL earlier in the year.

  [redacted] questioned if the green roof site should alleviate AoD within its boundary (as is the default for Borough grade sites), as those in the building below may not have access. Action: The rules around green roofs and alleviation of AoD to be discussed further in future Board meetings.

- The designation of Local grade sites was discussed regarding the green roof site. It was clarified that Local sites should have some level of access, or at least be viewable, as they are designated to redress SINC AoD. However, a site that only meets a Local grade would not be designated as Borough if there was no public access – ecological value is still the predominant factor.

- [redacted] noted that there are important geological sites in proposed Hampstead Heath and Waterloo Park sites, and these should be noted in the SINC citations. Camden agreed to include these details, so [redacted] to send geological information to [redacted] to pass on to Camden.

- [redacted] commented on the need to be provided with tracked changes for the Metropolitan site citations to enable the Board to fully review any proposed changes. Action: [redacted] to send these to the Board.

  As part of this discussion, the need for borough specific information in large Metropolitan citations was highlighted, specifically for the London Canal site (M006). The Board agreed that this information should be captured, and [redacted] confirmed that the dataset has the capability to produce borough specific citations for sites.

- There were a number of suggestions on the content of the report, including the need for a contents page and the inclusion of an overall map of the borough for context. [redacted] noted that there needs to be a careful review of site names, e.g. Regents Park vs. The Regents Park, and he will liaise with Camden directly to address this.

- It was noted that LB Camden have combined Borough grades I & II in a similar way to other boroughs who have reviewed their SINCs recently.

- There was discussion on when Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should submit to the Board. [redacted] noted that changes are unlikely after Local Planning Regulation 19, and the Board's recommendation letter is an important consideration for inspectors in later stages (as the majority do not read the SINC review in full). It was agreed that if LPAs have followed the correct processes, are unlikely to have major changes or contentious sites, and inform the Board if any major changes do occur, then a recommendation can be sent at this early stage.

5. LNHS on Axiophyte Priority Species List

[redacted] was unable to attend the meeting so could not give an overview of the project. However, [redacted] notified the Board of an upcoming questionnaire to be sent to the London Boroughs Biodiversity Forum (LBBF) to inform this process and encouraged officers to respond.

6. Discussion topic: Designating sites in London, specifically for taxa

This discussion follows the advice provided for Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) around designated areas for important fauna/flora/invertebrates. [redacted] asked if sites discovered to be important to particular species should be considered to have additional value in a review of their SINC status, and if there should be a link between important areas and SINCs.

It was agreed that existing selection criteria should pick up on important species and assemblages, but there could be more explicit guidance around this.

It was also noted that while it makes sense to designate sites for species, species conservation status can change relatively quickly, which makes designing for habitats more 'future proof'. [redacted] gave the example of Jersey cudweed that some sites in Tower Hamlets were designed for due to its rarity, but it is now widespread in London. Designations should also carefully consider recording effort. In any situation, the designation justification should be clearly stated so it can be reviewed in the case of change.

[redacted] confirmed that the SINC dataset has the capability to attach species and designation details to sites, so this must have been discussed and highlighted as a need in the past.

In conclusion, it was noted that additional guidance is required, and the process shouldn't be over complicated ('if it ain't broke, don't fix it').

7. AoB – Waltham Forest SINC Review guidance

[redacted] asked the Board for advice on Waltham Forest's SINC review process.

Their last SINC review is decades old, but any newly commissioned review would not be ready in time to be adopted in the borough's upcoming Local Plan. As waiting for the next Local Plan might take as long as a decade, [redacted] is considering conducting a SINC review to put recommendations into a BAP/LNRS, as well as flagging proposed sites in GiGL's proposed SINC dataset.

The Board agreed that they would happily see and comment on a review in the above scenario. In addition, [redacted] also suggested including the SINC review in other reports/policies where possible (e.g. Green Infrastructure SPD). BNG could also be used as a hook to encourage the funding of a review, but a potentially dangerous one. Another hook would be if the borough declared an ecological emergency.

[redacted] questioned what came out of the sustainability report for the Local Plan review, and these were mostly comments on changes to Epping Forest in Regulation 18.

[redacted] concluded by saying that LB Waltham Forest could come to the Board for advice at any point in the future.

The next LWSB meeting will be held in March 2024.

London Wildlife Sites Board

3rd July 2022

Chair: [redacted] (GLA)
Minutes: [redacted] (GiGL)
Present: [redacted] (Tower Hamlets), [redacted] (LWT), [redacted] (Richmond), [redacted] (Islington), [redacted]
Apologise: [redacted] (London Geodiversity Partnership)

Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Richmond SINC review
3. Questions raised during previous meetings
4. AoB

1. Introductions

- [redacted] moving to Islington Parks Public management, so will be leaving the board.
- Richmond is hiring a new Ecology officer to their team.

2. Richmond SINC review

Borough documentation

All the documents are on the council website:
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/services/planning/planning_policy/local_plan/local_plan_evidence/open_land_biodiversity_research
Survey wave one report:
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/22967/lp_evidence_sinc_review_volume_1.pdf
Supporting evidence:
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/22968/lp_evidence_sinc_review_volume_2.pdf
Survey wave 1 addendum:
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/23054/lp_evidence_sinc_review_addendum.pdf
Survey wave two report:
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/28075/lbrup_sinc_volume_1_report_2022.pdf
Supporting evidence:
https://www.richmond.gov.uk/media/28076/lbrup_sinc_volume_2_report_2022.pdf

The site selection panel (Richmond Biodiversity Partnership) included representatives of the Royal Parks, Kew, Historic Royal Palaces, local Friends Groups and the wetland centre. The panel was asked for site suggestions alongside independent ecologists.

Richmond are currently in Local Planning Regulation 19 and are expected to adopted their new Local Plan (and proposed SINCs) next year.

Board review

The board agreed that the survey process was thorough with a detailed approach completed to a high standard. This was helped by the employment of experienced, trusted local surveyors.

The Metropolitan site additions were agreed to be sensible and it is positive to see these sites being expanded and buffered. The thoroughness of the approach was praised, e.g. asking WWT and the Royal Parks to provide evidence for their Met sites.

There was unanimous agreement from the board to approve Richmond's SINC review. [redacted] will draft a letter of confirmation and send it to Richmond as soon as possible.

Summary of discussions:

- Borough grade: [redacted] questioned why the borough combined grades BI and BII into B. It was highlighted that the line between the two is the most difficult to draw, but keeping them separate gives site managers/owners incentive to reach higher grades and keeping the distinction is recommended were possible.
  It was agreed that additional guidance is needed to help boroughs decide what grades to use and highlight the value of keeping BI/BII. *Potential action: Pull out grade guidance from existing documents and expand on.*

- Local sites: [redacted] questioned why some sites were proposed as Local when they only had the potential to meet the criteria in the future (e.g. Broomroad recreation ground). [redacted] confirmed that these sites will remain as candidates, along with those not yet surveyed, until they either meet the criteria or are ruled out. [redacted] highlighted the importance of maintaining high SINC standards.

- Kew meadow path: [redacted] questioned the proposed de-designated of this site due to the absence of 1 species, the two-lipped snail. [redacted] confirmed this species had not been found for many years and it was unlikely to re-colonise due to the sites location and existing habitat. As the site was only designated for this species and it is not council owned land, the decision was taken to de-designate it and the board agreed with the additional information provide. The two-lipped snail is moving downstream for unknown reasons and there are efforts to conduct regional surveys for it.

- Sites not yet surveyed: At the time of the SINC review, there were a number of sites awaiting a report or a survey (due to restricted access). The London Wetland Centre survey has produced a report on their site, and the remainder were reviewed in new waves of surveys in 2020/21/23. Some were only visible from adjacent roads, e.g. a small area of Hampton Water treatment works that was determined to not be of a high enough standard.

3. LWSB Questions

A number of questions were compiled by [redacted] based on previous meeting minutes and discussions with the GLA. These were reviewed by the board.

- Should MOL be counted in the calculation of Areas of Deficiency in Access to Nature (SINC AoD) in the same way as Green Belt?

  It was agreed that MOL should be counted the same. *Action: GiGL will update the SINC AoD methodology to incorporate MOL in the same as Green Belt.*

  The reasoning for excluding Local sites from the calculation was also questioned, as politically it is hard to argue for Local sites when this does not impact the SINC AoD. It was highlighted that SINC AoD measures access to 'high quality' nature that Londoner's deserve, and other methods such as POS AoD measure access to more general areas of open space. It was noted that there needs to be clearer wording around this, and that sites 'alleviating' AoD referred to in a GLA report originally meant sites that don't impact the final AoD but do help locally. This is in contrast GiGL's use of the word, which means sites that impact the AoD in the surrounding area. *Action: [redacted] to try and find the original GLA report. [redacted] to look into GiGL's use of the word 'alleviate' to help clarify the role of Local sites.*

- Could GiGL have access to previous LWSB meeting minutes?
  Action: [redacted] working on.

- Is there a need to update/review/publish the original LWSB terms of service and related documentation from 2010?
  Action: [redacted] to circulate these amongst the board to reviewed in the next meeting.

- SINC review advice: The current advice to review SINCs within 10 years was reinforced, but there is a lack of supporting information. It was originally based on DEFRA Local site guidance, but these documents are likely not available online anymore. It was highlighted that SINCs should be reviewed every time a Local Plan is reviewed either fully or partially (depending on resources/timescales), but a full review is needed every 10 years and this is a biodiversity priority. *Action: Ensure the backing for this is clear in the review of LWSB documentation.*

- When should Local Planning authorities (LPAs) go to the LWSB?
  LPAs should present their review to the LWSB as soon as possible after it has been agreed to internally, likely in Regulation 19 (but possibly Regulation 18). Boroughs are welcome to come to the board at any point for advice and guidance when planning a survey or review.

- What, if anything, should be done when boroughs go against the board?
  This has only happened once, when Enfield rejected the LWSB's recommendation to not adopt a proposed Met site. GiGL's SINC dataset only includes sites that have been formally adopted by LPAs, which includes Enfield's Met site, but there is a field highlighting that this was not approved by the LWSB (available in the GIS layer but not the citations, currently).
  There is no legal action that can be taken as LPAs designate their own sites, but there is sometimes confusion over the role of the LWSB in reviewing/approving these sites. For example, Croydon didn't include Met sites in their recent review as they believed this to be the Mayor's responsibility. This became a larger issue when the London Plan stopped publishing a map of Metropolitan sites.
  It was suggested that there could be an appeals process for boroughs to challenge the decision of the board with an independent body.

- Citations: Reason for designation
  The suggestion of adding a text section to the SINC citations highlighting the key reasons why a site was designated (e.g. due to specific species/habitats) was met with approval and the usefulness of this for planners and site managers was highlighted.
  Action: GiGL to implement new field in citations to show reasons for designation (but will need input from all LPAs to ensure the right reasons are extracted from the existing citation text). Metropolitan sites should be reviewed by the LWSB.

- Citations: Borough specific citations for large sites
  [redacted] confirmed that in the past the GLA did hold multiple citations for large, multi-borough sites (e.g. M31 River Thames), which is very useful for local planners trying to access information specific to their area.
  Action: [redacted] to investigate location of old GLA borough specific SINC locations in the GLA and GiGL systems respectively.

- LWSB membership
  It was agreed that a new membership drive is needed. The original LWSB documentation stated that 'Statutory agencies and bodies to be represented by Natural England' and 'Wider biodiversity working to be represented by the LBP'. [redacted] suggested inviting the Natural England LNRS advisor for London which was met with agreement.
  Action: [redacted] to start new membership drive, [redacted] to advertise at the LBBF.

- Meeting regulatory
  It was agreed that meetings should be booked in quarterly, but they might not all be needed if there are no items to discuss. The importance of giving boroughs set dates to plan for submission to the LWSB was highlighted.
  Action: [redacted] to book in future quarterly meetings.

Questions on GLA SINC webpage, habitat classifications and missing citations were skipped due to time but will be reviewed in future LWSB meetings.

4. AoB

No other business.