

Richmond upon Thames

Habitat Action Plan

Ancient Parkland & Veteran Trees



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“Those grey, gnarled, low browed, knock kneed, bowed, bent, huge, strange, long armed, deformed, hunch backed, misshapen oak men that stand waiting and watching, century after century.”

(Francis Kilvert, *Diary of F. Kilvert*, 1876)

1. Aims

- To develop a strategic approach to the protection and management of the London Borough of Richmond’s veteran trees.
- To promote the value of veteran trees and secure the involvement of the London Borough of Richmond’s populace in their conservation.

2. Introduction

Veteran trees can be defined as ‘trees, which by virtue of their great age, size or condition for that species are of exceptional value culturally, in the landscape or for wildlife.’

Veteran trees form a valuable part of our heritage, in historic, cultural and ecological terms. These attributes are now being recognised, along with their aesthetic appeal and landscape contribution.

Veteran trees can be found throughout the London Borough of Richmond –

- In areas of historical park, for example, in Richmond and Bushy Parks,
- In woodland, for example, The Copse in Ham and
- As relics of a former landscape, for example, in residential gardens in Hampton, the playing field at Barn Elms and the willows along the River Crane.

Many of them are bygones from a former time when they would have stood in much larger landscapes, harvested by pollarding (see 4.3) and revered for their economic value and religious meaning.

The ‘ancient’ stage of their life may be the longest, lasting for hundreds of years. It is not just the trees that are valuable but the enormous diversity of other species that they support, for example, fungi, lichen, mosses, beetles, birds and bats. Many of these species are dependent on the dead wood habitat that is associated with veteran trees, for food and shelter. Indeed, several species of rare fungus do not appear until the tree reaches this age and condition.

3. Current Status

Data on the condition and number of veteran trees in Richmond is incomplete. The Royal Parks carried out a survey of ancient oaks in Richmond Park between 1999 and 2002 but there remains a great many trees of other species, which were not surveyed. It is known that the rest of the Borough supports a large number of veteran trees and it is recognised that a systematic approach to surveying and recording the whole resource is needed. Where individual trees have been protected by Tree Preservation Orders the details are held on a Council database.

4. Specific Factors Affecting the Habitat

The following list comprises the threats to the number and condition of veteran trees. An aim of this action plan is to raise awareness of these potential threats.

4.1 Removal of trees and dead wood

This is particularly relevant in built up areas where old trees and dead wood is removed for Health and Safety concerns. Although Health and Safety is of course of paramount concern there is often an element of over caution. A balance should be sought.

In residential areas removal of dead wood may be a consequence of 'over tidying' by gardeners.

4.2 Die-back

There are a number of theories on the cause of die back, which can be observed on trees in Richmond Park, Sheen Common and Barnes Common. Air pollution and extreme climatic conditions (drought and high water levels) are all possible causes that weaken the tree's resistance to pathogens. In Richmond European species appear less tolerant of these extremes.

4.3 Inappropriate management and neglect

Veteran trees do require care. There are many actions that can damage trees including compaction of the roots by cars and/or people. The area around the tree needs to be cared for as well as the tree itself.

Many veteran trees were previously 'pollarded' – a management technique that involves rotationally cutting branches above the browsing level. Pollarding encourages longevity through reducing crown size in proportion to root stock.

Re-introducing this ancient management technique, after centuries of non-intervention in other parts of the country has resulted in the death of some trees due to shock.

4.4 Lack of replacement trees

As veteran trees die or are lost, the lack of a younger generation of trees to replace them is producing a skewed age structure. This is leading to a loss of dead wood habitat and associated species.

To encourage a new generation of 'veterans' traditional management techniques need to be implemented on young genetic stock taken from existing veterans.

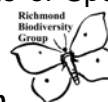
5. Current Action

5.1 Legal status

The UK Biodiversity Steering Group (1995) has produced a national habitat plan for lowland wood-pasture and parkland, but there is not a specific plan for veteran trees. Some individual ancient trees are covered by Tree Preservation Orders, for their amenity value and many veteran trees support species, such as bats and stag beetles that are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW act 2000).

Regionally, the London Biodiversity Partnership has produced an audit on 'open landscapes with ancient/old trees'.

Locally, across the borough a number of veteran trees are protected by the Town and Country Planning Act (1999) for their amenity value. Trees are also taken into consideration in the determination of planning applications. Many veteran trees receive protection because they are located within protected sites, for example, Richmond Park – a Site of Special Scientific Interest



(SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR) and cSAC (candidate Special Area of Conservation) and The Copse in Ham – a Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation.

5.2 Mechanisms Targeting the Habitat

These current actions are ongoing. They need to be supported and continued in addition to the new action listed under Section 7.

5.2.1 The Richmond Tree Warden Scheme

The Veteran Tree Focus group comprises representatives of the Richmond Tree Warden Scheme and is responsible for the survey of veteran trees in the borough. This survey will provide information on the number and condition of veteran trees in the borough.

5.2.2 The Royal Parks

The Royal Parks (Richmond and Bushy) support a large percentage of the veteran trees in the borough and a programme of surveys are ongoing in Richmond Park. A 30-year management plan has been written for Richmond Park, and a similar study is planned for Bushy Park

5.2.3 Local Planning Authority

The planning system affords protection for trees of amenity value.

6. Flagship Species

These special plants and animals are characteristic of veteran trees in LB Richmond.

| Common Name | Latin Name | Brief Description |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Stag beetle | <i>Lucanus cervus</i> | Larvae requires dead wood to feed in for up to 7 years before emerging as adult beetle |
| Bats | Various spp | Many bat species roost in cracks and crevices in mature trees |
| Beef steak fungus | <i>Fistulina hepatica</i> | Slowly degrades the heart wood creating ideal nesting habitats and food source |
| Great spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> | A species likely to be seen on veteran trees during the day |
| Cardinal Click Beetle | <i>Ampedus cardinalis</i> | Develops in the rotten heartwood of old oak trees |
| Tawny Owl | <i>Strix aluco</i> | Nests in suitable natural cavities and holes in large trees |

7. Objectives, Actions and Targets

Please note that the partners identified in the tables are those that have been involved in the process of forming the plan. It is not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcomed and needed. The leads identified are responsible for co-ordinating the actions – but are not necessarily implementers.

Objective 1: To map the distribution of all existing veteran trees in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Target: To input relevant data on to a Geographical Information System (GIS) by 2008

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|-------------|------|----------------|
| 1.1 Survey and map the existing population of veteran trees in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (ongoing) | 2007 | RTWS | TRP HRP |
| 1.2 To collate and record all survey data | 2008 | LA | TRP |
| 1.3 Monitor condition of veteran trees | Ongoing | RTWS | TRP HRP |

Objective 2: Ensure that veteran trees are protected and enhanced with the planning process through liaison with Tree Officers/Planning Section

Target: Ensure that no veteran trees are lost to development and are protected during the development phase

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|-------------|------|----------------|
| 2.1 Integrate veteran tree data within existing TPO system | 2007 | LA | GIGL, TRP |
| 2.2 Prepare working brief for Tree/Planning Officers outlining importance of veteran trees. | 2006 | LA | TRP |

Objective 3: Make provision for the replacement of existing veteran trees

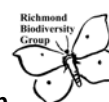
Target: No significant change in veteran tree numbers by 2010

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|-------------|--------|----------------|
| 3.1 Establish nursery stock through growing local provenance seeds and cuttings | 2008 | TRP | RBGK, BTCV, LA |
| 3.2 Identify a minimum of 5 sites for replacement and appropriate management | 2007 | TRP/LA | RTWS |
| 3.3 Identify 50 young trees for implementation of traditional management | Achieved | TRP | |
| 3.4 Publicise and celebrate ongoing traditional management techniques of young pollards | Ongoing | TRP | LA |

Objective 4: Encourage sympathetic management of existing veteran trees and dead wood as a valuable wildlife habitat.

Target: Disseminate good practice guidelines by 2006

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|-------------|------|---------------------|
| 4.1 Send an advice note to all managers and owners of parks, woodlands, nature reserves, golf courses and formal gardens to encourage sympathetic management of veteran trees | 2006 | TRP | LWHWG, LA, RBG, GLA |
| 4.2 Provide information and training to 4.3 arboriculturalists, contractors, planning and tree officers to raise awareness of the need for sympathetic management | 2006 | TRP | LA, LTOA |
| 4.3 Send relevant information to developers as and when applications arrive | Ongoing | LA | LTOA, RFS |
| 4.4 Disseminate decaying wood leaflet to all landowners, managers, golf courses, friends of groups and community groups | 2006 | LA | TRP, RBG |



Objective 5: Generate awareness of the importance of veteran trees to all Richmond upon Thames residents

Target: Undertake a series of awareness raising activities of veteran trees in London Borough of Richmond upon Thames annually

| Action | Target Date | Lead | Other Partners |
|---|-------------|--------|----------------|
| 5.1 Continue publicity campaign, including regular posters and press releases that include information on the needs of veteran trees. | Ongoing | LA/TRP | RTWS |
| 5.2 Produce a simple leaflet detailing the importance of veteran trees. | 2006 | LA | TRP |
| 5.3 Organise an open meeting to encourage wider involvement in the action plan | 2005 | LA/TRP | RTWS |
| 5.4 Involve 5 schools in school ground surveys for veteran trees | 2008 | LA | RBGK |
| 5.5 Hold a 'Ancient tree day' to celebrate the cultural, historical and ecological importance of trees | 2007 | TRP/LA | RBG |
| 5.6 Produce a leaflet about the importance of managing decaying wood as a valuable habitat | 2005 | LA/TRP | EN, LWT |

Relevant Action Plans

Local Plans

Broadleaved woodland, acid grassland, stag beetle, bats, mistletoe, songthrush

London Plans

Woodland, open landscapes with ancient/old trees, private gardens, churchyards and cemeteries

National Plans

Lowland wood pasture and parkland, stag beetle

Abbreviations

BTCV – British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
 EN – English Nature
 GIGL – Greenspace Information for Greater London
 GLA – Greater London Authority
 HRP – Historic Royal Palaces (Hampton court and Home park)
 LA – Local Authority (London Borough of Richmond upon Thames)
 LBP – London Biodiversity Partnership
 LTOA – London Tree Officers Association

LWHWG – London Woodland HAP Working Group
 LWT – London Wildlife Trust
 RBG – Richmond Biodiversity Group
 RBGK – Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
 RFS – Royal Forestry Society
 RTWS – Richmond Tree Warden Scheme
 TRP – The Royal Parks

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