



June 2017

Dear Local Planning Authority,

Re: biodiversity in planning

I am writing to you to highlight the importance of applicant commissioned data searches from local environmental records centres as part of a diligent planning application process. In London, this is where GiGL's expertise lies.

Background

Research¹ conducted in 2016 by the Greater London Authority shows that approximately 18% of planning applications have the potential to impact adversely on nature in the capital. Currently, only 1% of applications² are informed by a data search from Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC (GiGL). This means that local planning authorities (LPAs) are not always presented with full evidence and may be granting permission to applications that will have an adverse impact on nature, and in turn go against the LPA's responsibilities as defined by the London Plan (policy 7.19) and the NERC Act.

Other recent publications, including the London Assembly's 'At Home With Nature'³ (2017), and the British Standards Institution's BS42020 'Biodiversity Code of practice for planning and Development' (2013) set out clear recommendations on what to expect of planning applications with regard to nature, in order to help local authorities and applicants comply with regional and national planning policy.

GiGL services

GiGL mobilises, curates and shares access to data that underpin our knowledge of London's natural environment, in order to enable our stakeholders to make informed decisions in policy and practice. We aim to raise awareness of the benefits the natural environment provides to the capital and to ensure the protection and enhancement of London's natural environment are at the heart of the services GiGL provide.

GiGL can help LPAs meet their policy commitments in two ways:

- The data search service provides access to planning-related information about London's natural environment. When commissioned at an appropriate stage in the application process, the information can be used to inform additional work by the applicant and their contractors, resulting in higher quality applications that are more easily and rapidly assessed by LPA staff.
- By becoming a partner in GiGL, London boroughs gain access to planning-specific services based on the same evidence base that informs applicants' data search reports.

¹ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/biodiversity_and_planning_research_report_0.pdf

² <http://www.gigl.org.uk/planning-title-page/data-searches-and-planning/>

³ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/at_home_with_nature_-_encouraging_biodiversity_in_new_housing_developments.pdf

What to look out for in relevant applications:

Good practice

- Evidence of a GiGL data search being commissioned at an appropriate stage of the application. This evidence can be in the form of interpreted information in the application documents, informed new survey effort, and a copy of the GiGL data search report's summary sheet
- Evidence of accessing additional sources of high quality detailed data (100m resolution or less), in conjunction with express permission to use the data for commercial purposes. These sources include MAGIC and the National Biodiversity Network's Atlas

Bad practice

- The submission of an application claiming that no data were available
- The use of open data at anything other than capture resolution as they are not precise enough to inform local decisions
- The use of shared data published under a non-commercial licence. This is a breach of the licence conditions and should be reported to the data owner for further action.
- Where GiGL data have been used without permission, please report it to my colleague Maria Longley, GiGL's Community Manager at maria.longley@gigl.org.uk
- The inclusion of a GiGL data search report. They are supplied to our clients for internal use only, and any breach of the terms and conditions should be reported to GiGL so further action can be taken

If you recognise our range of services can help you improve your performance and compliance rates, please contact me at julie.cox@gigl.org.uk.

Kind regards,



Julie Cox
GiGL Partnership Manager (maternity cover)