GiGL's data search reports
Their importance in planning and tips to improve the process

GiGL's data search reports are an authoritative source of information on London's natural environment. Each pdf report contains interpreted and summarised data relating to a specific site and its surrounding area, including designated sites, species, habitats, open spaces and other important features. See an example of a report here.

WHY
Why data search reports should be consulted in the development management process.

London Plan (2021)
Policy G6 Biodiversity and access to nature - D: *"Development proposals should manage impacts on biodiversity and aim to secure net biodiversity gain. This should be informed by the best available ecological information and addressed from the start of the development process."*

GiGL, as a well-established and trusted organisation working in London since 1996, has access to a huge network of recorders and data providers. GiGL has been accredited by the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres since 2016, and is a certified member of Social Enterprise UK.

Ecological consultants who consult a GiGL data search report have access to a robust evidence base, are taking into account the local context of a site and are following best professional practice as set out by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

Evidence of a GiGL data search is a measure of how the applicant is following London Plan policy. GiGL's reports are the only source of accurate information about Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and proposed SINCs, the London Priority Species List (LPSL), the London Species of Conservation Concern (LSOCC) and the London Invasive Species Initiative (LISI).

Evidence of a GiGL data search report is a measure of a Local Authority's (LA) scrutiny and thoroughness, as well as how much they value and prioritise the protection and enhancement of the natural environment in their area. Learn more about how each LPA in London is performing on our website.

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HOW

How to ensure that the existing evidence base is consulted and enhanced.

Pre-application

Is your Local Authority (LA) a GiGL SLA partner? LAs have access to the same evidence base as in a data search report via our SLA services which enables them to make informed decisions.
Check how your LA is doing compared to other London LAs in terms of planning applications informed by a GiGL data search report.
Share any data you have for your area of interest. If sharing with other platforms ensure the CC-BY licence is used so that GiGL can use your records in data search reports. By sharing data you are enhancing the existing evidence base and enable data to be used in decision making and other projects (Example).

Determination

Once a planning application has been granted suitable conditions should be in place, informed by appropriate data and the local context. These are published in the decision notice along the planning application documents.
The conditions are discharged by the LA when appropriate actions are taken by the developer. LA's and developers should ensure the right information is provided and the right experts involved to discharge any ecology related conditions.

Implementation

Ecology reports are valid for one year. Depending on the works and requirements, an up to date data search report might be required for monitoring and reporting.
New data generated during implementation should be shared to enhance the evidence base for the future.

Validation

Check your LA has clear requirements in their validation process about developers considering impacts on the natural environment, consulting a data search report and sharing newly acquired data from development. This information will usually be in a validation checklist or planning application requirement document in the 'Planning and building control' (or 'Planning and developments') services section of the LA's website under the information for developers.

Decision making

You have the right to comment on planning applications by responding within the consultation period. This can be done in writing or online via the LA's website. Find the Search (or view) planning application option in the LA's website and search for the specific application. All the documents that have been submitted with the planning application can be viewed there along with the option to comment.
If you respond to a planning application, GiGL can provide a data search report free of charge, the information of which may be helpful in providing evidence for related arguments.
Check that adequate information has been submitted with a planning application. Ecology reports can demonstrate they have consulted a GiGL data search report by including the report's summary sheet.
Data published online and used in ecology reports are not always provided at appropriate resolution and/or available for commercial use and therefore may not be suitable for this use.

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Other useful resources

Policies and legislation

The are several policies and legislation for the protection and enhancement of nature. The most recent being the Environment Act 2021, which sets a requirement for all appropriate developments (from November 2023) to deliver a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) using Defra's BNG metric and mandated the preparation of spatial strategies called Local Nature Recovery Strategies. A summary of the Environment Act 2021 can be found here.

You can find more information on relevant policies and legislation in our website. We have also compiled relevant planning documents of London's LAs which we update annually. In the same page you can find contact details for each LA's planning department. If you'd like to learn more about BNG we have compiled a list of external BNG resources. The government website also has a guide to the planning system.

Responding to planning applications

When responding to planning applications it might be useful to refer to specific best practice and guidance when it comes to data provision in planning applications. You can find links and references to such documents in our Natural Environment Data in Planning webpage.

The Berskshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust has some useful information and tips in their website on responding to planning applications and consultations. More information on the planning application process can be found in the Planning Portal.

Wildlife Crime

The main role of the UK National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) is to assist in the prevention and detection of wildlife crime. The Metropolitan Police has a Wildlife Crime Unit and they have useful information on wildlife crime in their website. Useful information on this topic can also be found in The Wildlife Trusts' website. GiGL works closely with the Metropolitan Wildlife Crime Unit and they provide us with the wildlife crime information displayed in Discover London. Read an example of wildlife crime in relation to a planning application in London here and an example of a member of the public's complaint to the Ombudsman which was upheld here.

Important to note that:
- New data, if shared, can be used as evidence base for other work including Local Plans.
- Areas without data may still have unrecorded biodiversity. An area without shared biodiversity records is an area where nature is not represented in the planning process.

Partners can request a data search report from GiGL's Partnership team, and members of the public can get a report from GiGL's Community team, while eCountability delivers the reports for our clients on our behalf.

Explore Discover London, GiGL's online data portal. The Biodiversity Hotspots for Planning layer provides an indication of areas, where data are available, that have potential impacts on biodiversity and are likely to be relevant to local planning decisions.

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