

4.0 Landscape Types, Natural Landscape Areas and their Natural Signatures

Landscape analysis has developed significantly in recent years and a number of well-established methodologies now exist. Both Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Landscape Characterisation are widely used and acknowledged techniques for understanding the natural landscape. Given the unusual situation of the natural landscape in London, however, as well as our unique aims, which include the identification and promotion of what we are calling the 'Natural Signatures', the analysis used in the London Landscape Framework has instead employed a bespoke methodology which comprises aspects of both of these methods. We have also had to be especially clear at the outset about what, for us, constitutes a natural landscape. Whilst no green spaces are completely natural, the situation in London is particularly complex. The most widely used and loved green spaces are often the least natural – these include the highly landscaped Royal Parks as well as the managed amenity grasses of some of the Commons. Nevertheless some landscapes are more 'natural' than others, and for this reason, as well as to avoid duplication of the efforts already put into protecting and managing the better known green spaces, we have focused as much on overlooked remnants as on acknowledged amenities. In order to keep as close to the natural as possible, we have, as noted, confined our choice of areas to those which:

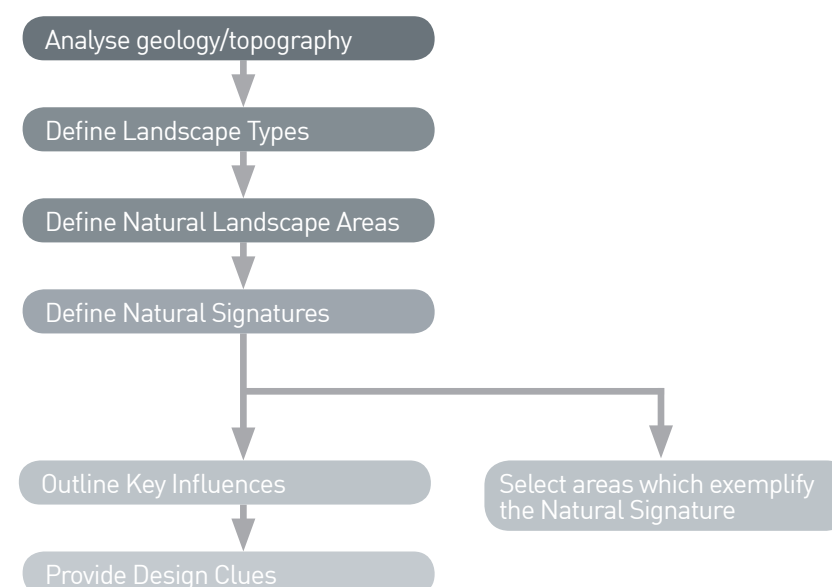
- are original watercourses, or
- contain vegetation which is typical of the soils and geology of its area, and/or
- allow an appreciation of the wider geomorphology and natural topography of London.

The first layer of this investigation has been wholly concerned with pure natural and geological data. Whilst perceptions cannot be overlooked, this data provides an objective base upon which interpretations can be layered. By overlaying a series of GIS data layers detailing bedrock and superficial geology (p.26), topography (p.27), soils data (p.28) and habitat data (p.29), a fascinating picture has emerged of the underlying nature of the land upon which the city of London has been built and from which it has directly grown. This accumulated data has also allowed us to delineate 7 broad Landscape Types within which sit 22 Natural Landscape Areas (shown on pages 31 and 32). The Landscape Types nestle within the existing National Character Areas that lie partly or wholly within London and form a wider context for this study.

The Landscape Types are based largely on common underlying geology while the Natural Landscape Areas acknowledge the many differences such as land cover between the individual areas. The focus of this study is at the Natural Character Area level and these are looked at in detail in the following chapters.

If both our methodology and the growth of London can be seen as layered processes, then built London (p.30) constitutes the final layer, which has to a great extent covered over the natural base. Nevertheless there are holes in the 'blanket' of London – here the natural landscapes peep through. Some of these landscapes are widely noted, others are mere fragments that are rather neglected, and they cover many different types of space from marshlands to remnant forest. Since our overarching aim is not simply to describe the Natural Landscape Areas but to succinctly encapsulate their essence, we have discussed in more depth only a number of these natural landscape features for each Natural Landscape Area, with the remainder listed in the tables included. Our focus has been on those assets which are especially revealing of the overriding character of the Natural Landscape Area.

The concept of the Natural Signature seeks to identify the unique natural identity of an area. It starts from the premise that each area has or had a unique natural heritage and its own distinctive special identity. (Since the area boundaries have been determined through a desktop approach, there will of course in reality exist more fluid



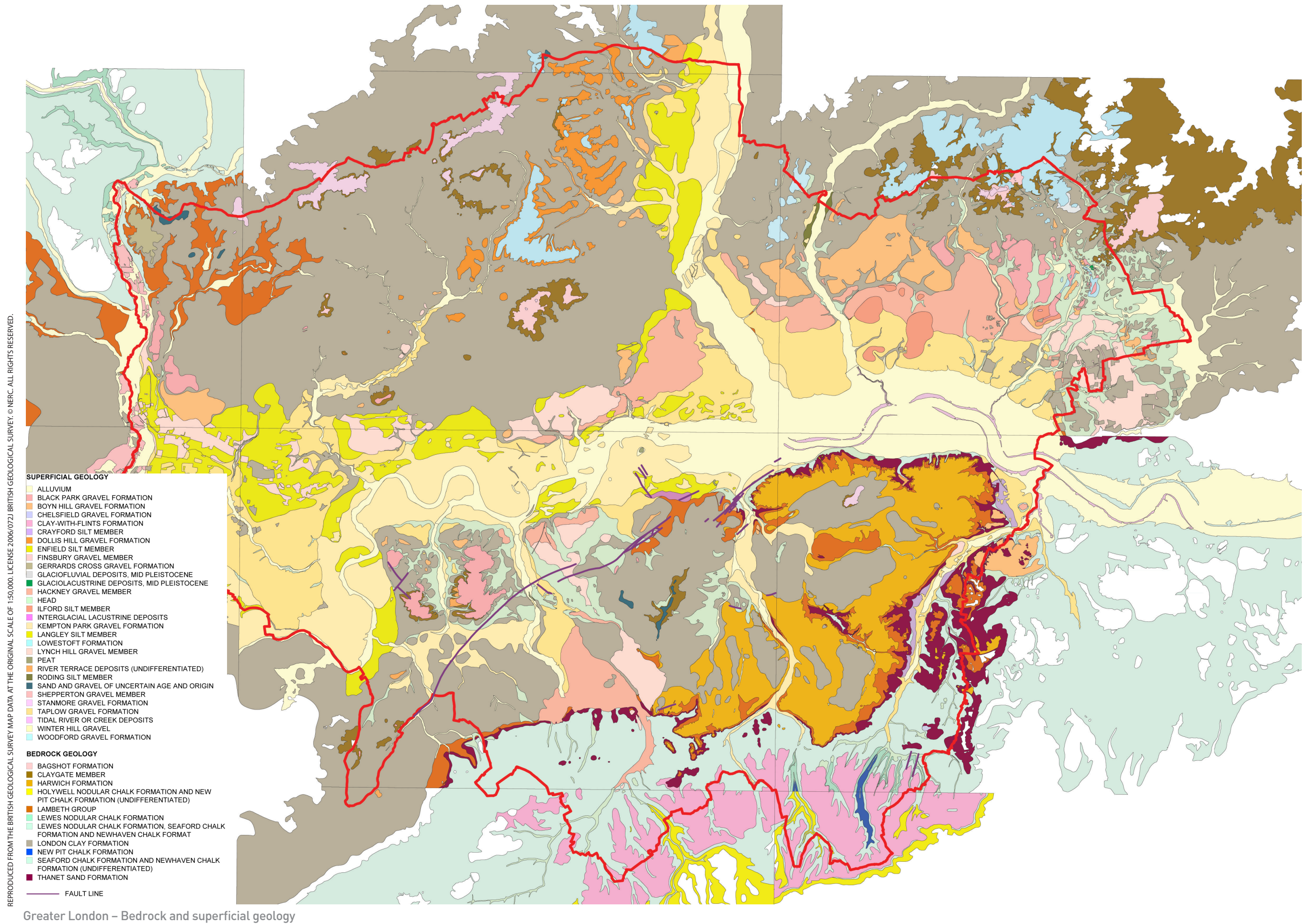
transitions and crossovers between them.) In the context of Greater London context, where built form so often predominates, the Natural Signature has been eroded as rivers have been culverted, native woodlands felled and landscape patterns destroyed. But remnant semi-natural habitats, local topographic and fluvial systems, patterns of rights of way and viewpoints often provide clues and pointers which suggest what local Natural Signatures might be.

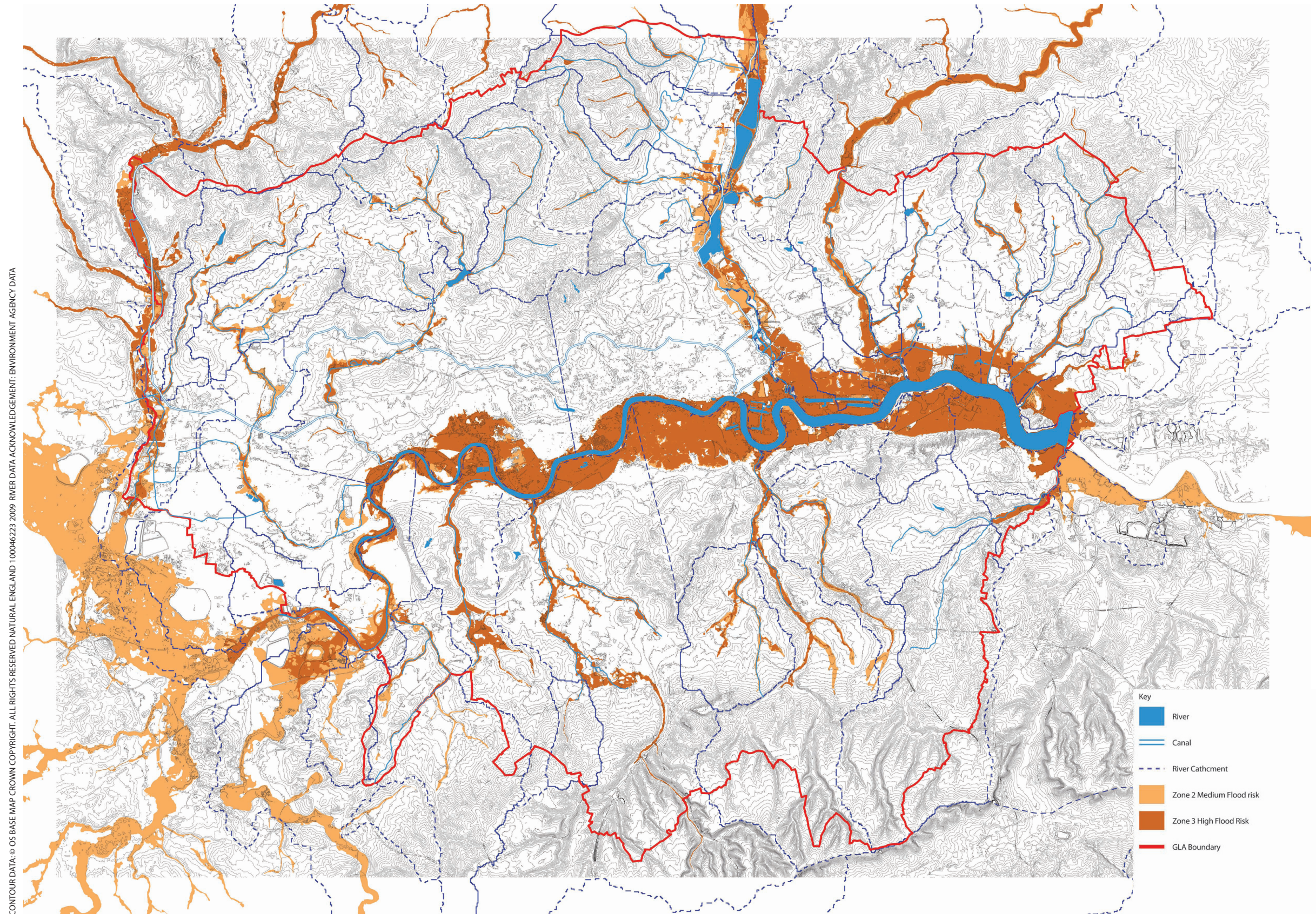
The description for each of the Natural Landscape Areas incorporates a summary of its unique Natural Signature which is derived from an analysis of remnant natural landscape features within each type. Landscape strategies for each area seek to reinterpret and express its Natural Signature within future new development sites, restoration projects and the management of existing areas. So the description of each Natural Landscape Area also incorporates ideas for underlining and promoting the Natural Signature of each area, firstly by listing the key component influences or characteristics which together make the Natural Signature uniquely distinctive, and secondly through a series of design clues to inform future development/design briefs and strategies.

We want to see this context expanded to include the natural environment and to see it acknowledged in new development and landscape design. Management, conservation and enhancement are the aim of all policy. By extending the Natural Signatures beyond the existing key habitats and green spaces, we aim to support and expand this remit.

The Design Clues are ideas which are intended to help shape decisions wherever there are opportunities for future landscape change and investment, for instance through new development, river restoration projects, open space design and/or landscape management strategies. They might be used by clients writing briefs for consultancy work or by designers seeking to respond to the wider context of their site. The Design Clues are intended to show how the Natural Signatures for each Natural Landscape Area might be expressed within the wider public realm, so extending their influence throughout adjacent urban areas.

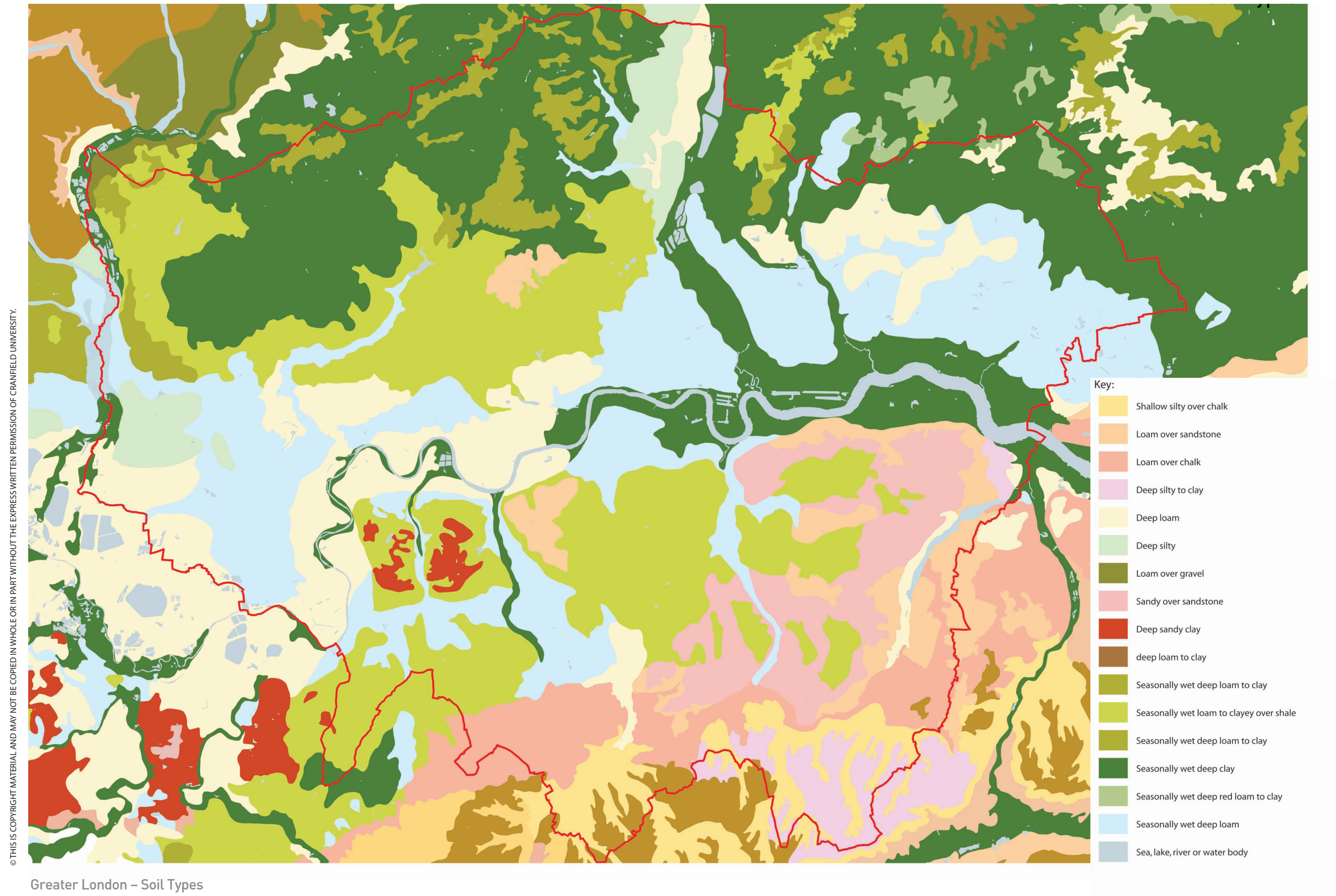
4.0 Landscape Character Types of London and their Natural Signatures

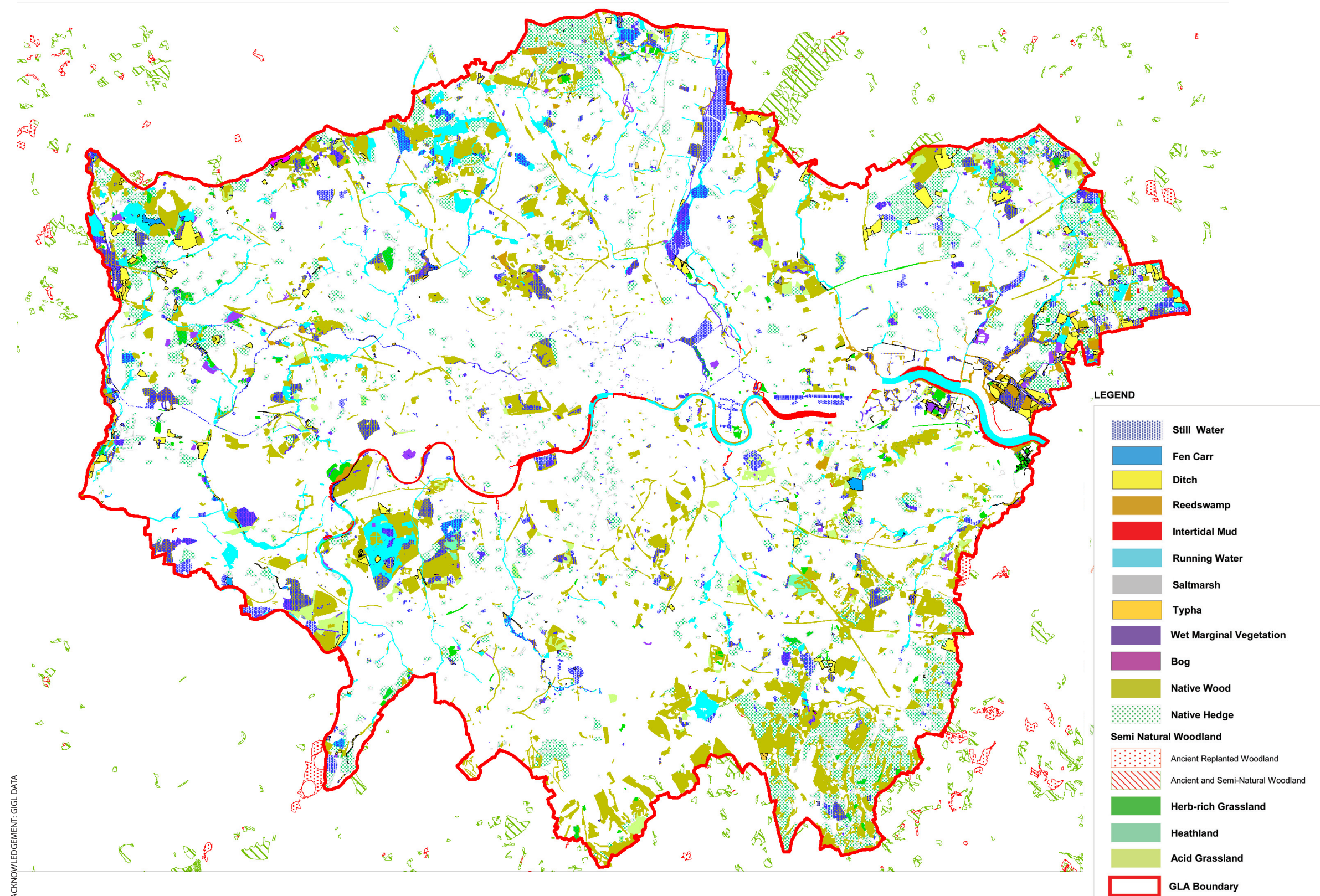




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Greater London – Topography, Rivers and Floodplains

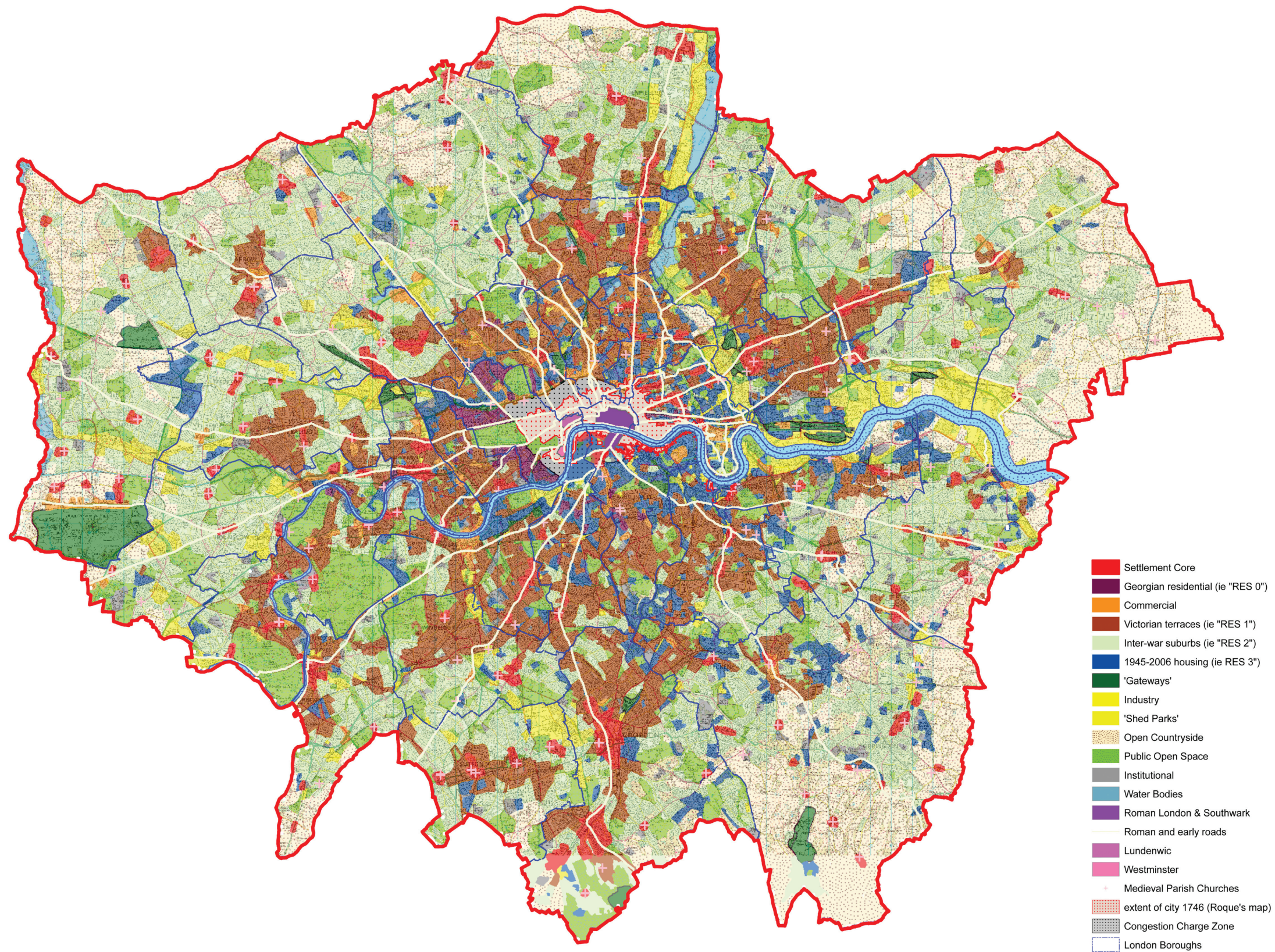




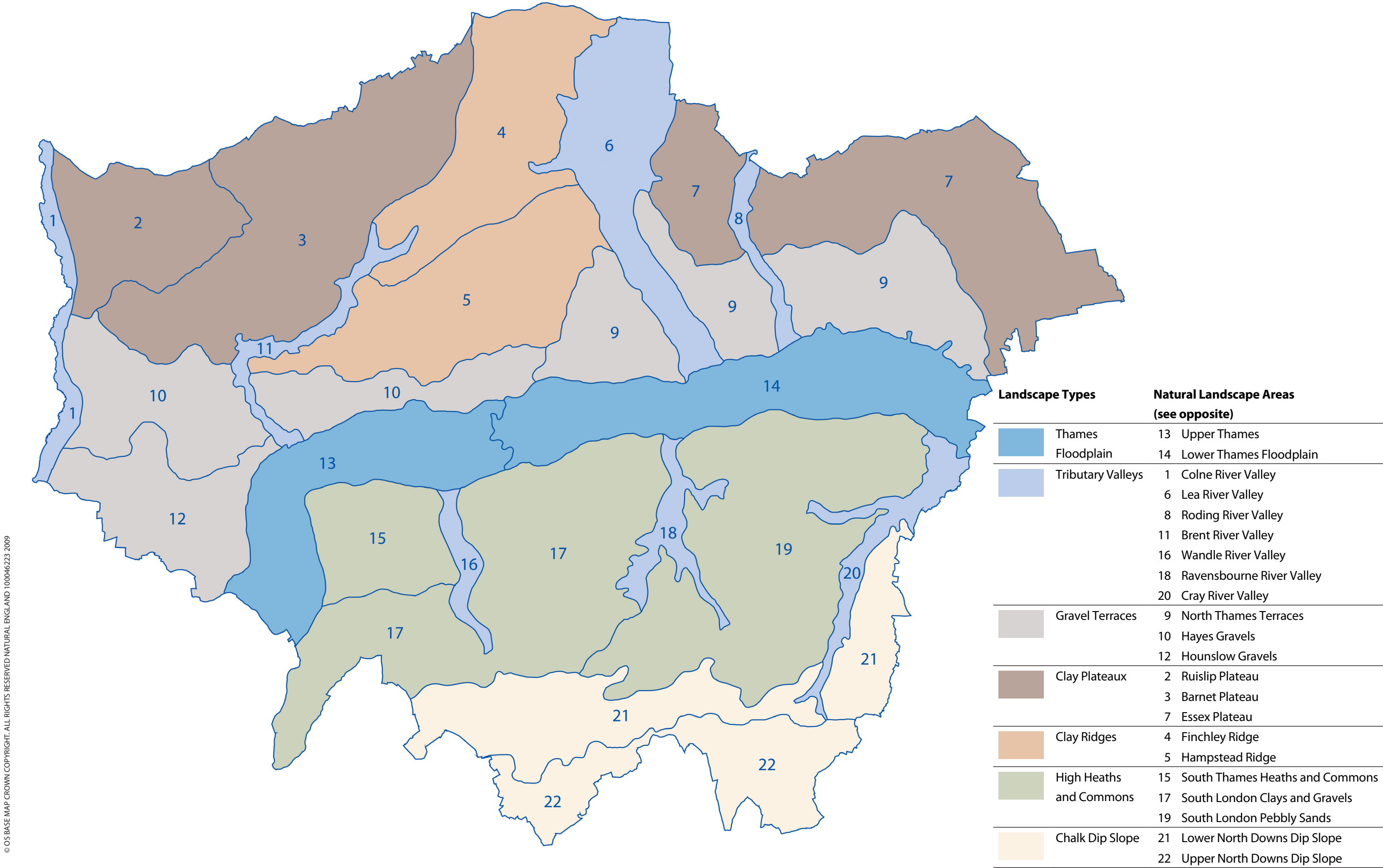
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: GIGI DATA

Greater London – Natural Habitats

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: ENGLISH HERITAGE DATA



Greater London – London's Historic Development (English Heritage Rapid Characterisation)



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London's 22 Natural Landscape Areas



- 1 Colne Valley
- 2 Ruislip Plateau
- 3 Barnet Plateau
- 4 Finchley Ridge
- 5 Hampstead Ridge
- 6 Lea Valley
- 7 Essex Plateau
- 8 Roding Valley
- 9 North Thames Terraces
- 10 Hayes Gravels
- 11 Brent Valley
- 12 Hounslow Gravels
- 13 Upper Thames
- 14 Lower Thames Floodplain
- 15 South Thames Heaths & Commons
- 16 Wandle River Valley
- 17 South London Clays & Gravels
- 18 Ravensbourne River Valley
- 19 South London Pebbly Sands
- 20 River Cray Valley
- 21 Lower North Downs Dip Slope
- 22 Upper North Downs Dip Slope

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