

Conference Report 2nd November 2010

Turning brown to green – what are the opportunities?

Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA)

Creating open space on previously developed land can provide genuine opportunities for making the most out of sites that are otherwise associated with blight and high management costs. Open spaces are multi-functional – offering not just a single land use solution, but the opportunity to achieve social, environmental and economic added value.

Previously developed land can present problems but also opportunities. The benefits range from water capture, cleansing and storage, flood-risk management, climate change adaptation to timber, food and energy production. However contamination, location biodiversity value, productivity, accessibility and proximity to potential beneficiaries of the services to developed sites, etc. need to be assessed and their economic implications should be considered.

The aim of this event was to improve the understanding of construction practitioners of the benefits of an holistic approach to restoring previously used land into multi-functional, 'working landscapes' that add social, environmental and economic value and thereby extending our network of public footpaths, parks and open spaces linking to and through our urban areas.

The event also previewed the findings of CIRIA's good practice guidance, 'Open Space Opportunities for Previously Developed Land', and also provided an opportunity to encourage construction professionals to discuss their issues with other stakeholders. This will help the private and public sectors to think comprehensively about the environmental and economic purpose of restoring previously used land for conservation, preservation, production and recreation.

Open Space for London – under the new government

Peter Massini, Programme Office, GLA

The London Plan is under revision but the policies relating to Green Infrastructure (GI) are being rolled out to a wider programme. Originally based upon the East London Green Grid, guidance is being published that will promote this project across the entirety of London.

Key drivers for this focus are: climate change, flood management and health.

Further information:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/thelondonplan> - London Plan

Planning process – how to make this work better

Hugh Ellis, Chief Planner and Stephanie Dickins, Project Assistant, Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)

The major pressures for planners currently are around climate change, social justice, globalisation and acute housing shortages. The TCPA are looking to continue lobbying the government, particularly in light of the abolishment of the RDA's and the subsequent spatial planning voids left by the change. The Localism Bill is due to be published next year which will provide more details about the new planning process.

Planning for climate change, particularly large-scale infrastructure projects will continue to require wide-area partnerships and solutions. GI will play an important part of the adaptation strategies.

TCPA are currently working with European partners on an European Union European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) INTERREG IVC Programmect named GRABS; green and blue space adaptation for urban areas and eco towns. Southampton City Council is working on part of this project, and the London Borough of Sutton has produced green and blue toolkits.

Further information:

<http://www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/grabs.html> - Town and Country Planning Association

<http://www.sutton.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10908> – London Borough of Sutton

<http://www.sutton.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10961> – LB. Sutton, Toolkits for Hackbridge

How to work with the communities for open space projects

Euan Hall, Chief Exec, Land Trust

He discussed how although community engagement is known to be beneficial there are still issues regarding liabilities, ownership by the community and long-term management. Land Trust is an organisation who will help to manage any type of public open space. They hold land for the long-term (interim management) and look to cover funding through endowment or other sustainable source eg. service charges or renewable energy.

The organisation currently manages 21 sites in partnership with Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, LA's or others. They focus on achievable targets and aim to create opportunities for long-term volunteering or commitments.

Economic benefits by using such management structures include, providing an exit route for non-core land to amenity activity, and the protection and maintenance of assets.

Research from a developer showed that provision of high-quality GI adds up to 20% on return.

Further information:

<http://www.thelandtrust.org.uk> – Land Trust

London's Olympic Park – towards a 21st century park

John Hopkins, Project Sponsor, Parklands and Public Realm, ODA

Site of main 2012 Olympic stadiums in London was the Lea Valley; post-industrial, contaminated and one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK. The project is legacy driven, ie. what will be left after the games, with 75% of funding on permanent infrastructure.

Further information:

<http://www.london2012.com> – Official site

Delivering 'Ecosystem Services' (ES) through urban green infrastructure: Black Country Case Study

Celeste Morgan, Associate Director Sustainability, AECOM

The government is continuing to fund climate change adaptation programmes. There is a focus on rebalancing mitigation and the technical solutions for adaptation. Research has shown that a 10% increase in green cover in urban areas could negate climate change impacts until 2050. Cohesive future development needs to join up cycles, ie. water, waste etc.

The case study in the Black Country was a GIS mapping study of ES showing indicators including:

- Employment land – where it was performing well
- Housing – the values of the houses
- Green transport – access networks
- GI/Biodiversity
- Recreational value – using obesity rates etc.
- Tourism/heritage – areas with a 'sense of place'
- Air quality, Heat island effects and Flood risk – all mapped to show climate change map and priority areas

The work is ongoing, but through the research some issues have arisen regarding skills relating to SUD's; design, installation and management. SUD's guidance is due out from CIRIA soon.

Further information:

http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/10214/Naturally_Resilient_Cities.pdf - presentation regarding GI; slides 43-53 is the above case study

<http://blackcountrycorestrategy.dudley.gov.uk/examination/examination-library/j---examination-documents> - Core strategy documents; J6 policies are the above case study

<http://www.ciria.com/suds> - Information about Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems from CIRIA

Open Space in Liverpool – Brining the Festival Gardens back to life
Dave Noar, Managing Director, Mayfield Construction Ltd

The company is a BALI contractor with a £15m turnover who are based in Knowsley, Merseyside. The Festival Gardens site was due a £3.6m planning gain for 1400 houses on site. The North West Development Agency paid upfront for phase one to renew the park gardens, plus provided an endowment for the long-term.

Further information:

<http://www.langtreegroupplc.co.uk/festivalgardens> - information about the development
<http://www.festivalgardens.com/the-news/in-the-press/-3.7m-restoration-of-liverpool-s-festival-gardens-begins> – press story

A few easy steps for developing previously used land to open green space
Joanne Kwan, Project Manager, CIRIA

Why bother in the first place? This is often asked by developers when asked to provide green infrastructure. However, provision of GI can help avoid prosecution under environmental laws, improve PR and provide cost-effective solutions for flooding etc.