A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS

Environment Workshop
17th November 2016, 9.30 – 13.00

Natural Capital
Table 5 Session 2

Facilitator comments in bold
Respondents in regular text

These notes are a summary of the conversation

Session 2, Table 5

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Hello and welcome.

(Participants introduce themselves)

We will discuss a series of questions in this session:

1) Can a denser city be a greener city?
2) How do we make better use of London's green spaces in ways that contribute to 'good growth'?
3) Are new London Plan policies required to deliver the Mayor's ambition to make London a National Park City?
4) What are the limitations to your organisation to implementing the concepts of green infrastructure and natural capital?

Can a denser city be a greener city?

The mayor should not build on the green spaces in London; land should be allocated for both development and protection. The mayor should be firm on leaving the green spaces in London

as they are. The mayor's commitment to protect green space is great but the pressure to build houses in certain boroughs is high.

The mayor can put in place the framework to help inform decisions on developments and/or land protection.

London's green spaces are diverse and perform a multiplicity of functions, but some green spaces are poor quality and need improving. If they are not performing best purposes, what could they provide if quality improved? We need to look at these spaces including on the green belt.

There is a mindset from some vacant land is always is always performing a function. That is where the role of the GLA is to provide that cohesive vision for the spaces to ensure they have multiple benefits.

The mayors green space objectives need to link to the health strategy as well. The review of the green grid is significant in a spatial sense and encouraging boroughs to work for all Londoners. Inner London spaces are closer to people and we need to protect them. The green grid polices are strong but sometimes ignored.

We need to look at the quality of the green space rather than quantity. We have a lot of big green spaces but they are much less connected.

The definition of 'green' needs to change – you can also use balconies and flowerboxes on railings to encourage green spaces. If you look at the amount of roofs we have in London, there could be a policy to install community gardens.

Two points on this and the challenges. Part of the problems is that people don't understand poor quality; therefore the space is at a higher risk. How do we work out the value of that space and what is the mechanism?

That is very complicated. We see a scrappy wasteland and other people see things differently. Rare breeds or building site. What is quality? This is clearly something we need to talk about in terms of strategy.

We are trying to understand the values of green space - how do you understand or build that into a planning policy or investment decision?

People flock to the NHM; yet a green space is a living history museum. It is how you promote London as a natural environment - that is how you capture people's imagination.

From a practical planner's perspective, like in Greenwich, we always try to protect the green space, all our policies try to protect it but we need to house people too. We have to consider schools, empty housing, green space, and other policy areas and that is where the difficulties come in.

Are we in a situation where the quality of land is poor, and we might reduce the size of existing green space, to make it better quality? We also need to ensure a net platform of green space and the new environment is green.

These are the issues and it links to national policy.

The Government promised to protect our green space. This is a massive political issue. You have to get the public behind the issues and communities behind public space. In London you need to have a community group to fight for it.

Are there any positive opportunities in terms of green?

The friends' movement for example is positive.

Should every piece of green space be sacrosanct?

Yes. It needs protection.

It's not always about the quality of the site. A lot of the land in the green land is of very low quality. It is being protected for its openness, or use to improve air or transport links.

We need to do more to protect central London.

This is a big issue, how do we ensure these spaces are here in 100 years? We are putting a green wall trial in Mayfair, 80m squared, and seeded with dandelions and green roofs as well. Wild West End is doing some good work – we need to get other estates in London to add green bits. Not just putting a green roof here and there.

We are looking at different opportunities. In terms of retrofitting it can be piecemeal, and depends if you have enough land ownership. How do you enable that critical mass? When there are 100 land owners how do you get them to work together?

That is where you link with equality issues. Where the landowners are together, people house communities; my view is that the mayor should focus the attention there. Not to ignore the green belt, but there must be some priorities. Inequality is also an issue.

There are also health impacts; mental and physical wellbeing, a clear methodology is important for our green spaces.

In terms of the drive, there are issues of resilience and so forth.

Less about CSR; it is more about inclusive communities.

What was the driver for these ideas?

The fact it has been there and how we plan for the future especially lined to climate change.

I wonder what tools can be used to influence other estate managers.

We can apply certain leverage here, it is a collective.

You need to find the right level.

People might be frustrated if you are taking their parking space.

Community ownership is important. The friends groups and 3,000 green spaces. The starting point is the community roles and supporting and promoting the friends idea. That is really

important. Deficit of parks is not automatic budgets. The Mayor could think about just putting some money behind, like match funding, other services that provide increased benefit. Mayor needs to think about that, for example parks for London. If you do the maths, it is not a massive amount of money; we have to see where those benefits are applied.

There may be a deficiency of green space, how does this work?

There is the existing London green grid; we are looking at reviewing that. Where are the hot spots, access to nature and where and how do you identify where they converge based on the existing green space? What data is available and so forth? We might create a platform; that tool can be used at the borough level. Other thing is that there are no metrics of what metrics are required.

There is in central London, in terms of green infrastructure.

We measure green infrastructure using the Green Infrastructure Assessment (GIA) to assess the value of a green asset or a proposed green investment.

One thing is that it doesn't tell you what green infrastructure you need.

The mayor's developments needs to demonstrate very best practice. The issue of quantum, but we do not deal well with the species, 13,000 species, many require space and greater habitat, how do we take account of those? If that decision is made we need to know the impact.

One of the opportunities has to do with the targets

Local planning and proposals on the green belt, the opportunities in terms of proposals.

For example looking in Vauxhall and Battersea, the space is getting thinner and thinner.

In terms of the Wormwood Scrubs, the Olympic Park, people think it is better than what was there before.

Recognizing that things will change is important – there will be some wins and some losses. We know we can try to reduce these, and make the right kind of gains.

Views on where green infrastructure fits in, for example with cycling? Is the walking and cycling environment a pleasant one? A tree might provide shelter, and other benefits, but is there an opportunity to push that further?

I think that 3 or 4 years ago we thought there would be a lot more, our budget has narrowed down. There is a lot of evidence around the benefits of trees.

I get a lot of calls about trees being felled. I wonder if we keep that in mind in terms of loss.

Any proposal is subject to viability. A lot gets squashed - Boroughs get pushed. We need a strong voice. That includes everything in terms of space and new developments.

We are acutely aware of the lack of information around tree numbers and tree felling. The other thing is that it is easy for a tree being felled.

There are losses to try and increase quality but these needs to be defined. For example the Olympic Park. There are more people using those spaces than there was before. What is quality? There may be gains but we need to have the parameters.

What do you do in terms of enabling that can be done better through policy and practice?

Cut through the policy and understand what is expected. We also need a consistent way to measure the impact.

Let's move on to the next question. A national park city. It hasn't been defined – it's not a planning designation but a means to celebrate and drive leadership around a greener London. We talk about the green grid. How do you get from where we are now to there?

There are still questions around the strength of the policies. The principles at the moment are reasonably okay, maybe not vigorously enforced. Commitments to protecting space, like with wildlife sites. Visibility around what these designations are. Can't speak for the local authority; planners might not even understand they have wildlife sites. I wonder about discussions with planning departments.

Do you enable these types of things?

A national park facility is possible for London, need to increase visibility and ensures that sites are protected and are enhanced and funded better, a strategic role. Parks for London might be this, from one point of view; a campaign is more of a local campaign, visibility important.

We had an initiative to ask the people of London how they would like to use the city.

There is a massive difference between green parks and focused space. If we think of destination sites for parks, it is more about the surrounding community. There are some sites that will never be a destination.

My local green space will never be like that, completely flanked by three housing estates.

In terms of public realm it is about flexibility. If businesses were to encourage, when we tried this it has taken us months and months. If GLA led that it would be really good.

What are the barriers?

Some of the barriers are planning restrictions, parking policies and procedures within the councils to get sign off.

Sometimes the barrier stems from who started the idea i.e. with guerilla gardening - when politicians get involved it kills the whole concept.

We funded some of that work, allotments provide some of this. Nothing was formalized but it was guerilla, people going on their own.

People take a lead. There is a website to help facilitate this sharing of space – land share.

We have litter picking in green and small places, clearing up trees, and is there something there that captures that environment? You can support this in certain ways.

In terms of gardens, there is a website where you can do a gardeners' swap. This could work in London especially if people don't knw how to care for, or have the time to tend to their gardens. You can borrow somebody's dog, why not a garden.

There are issues there in terms of resilience. How do you look at this? It is about changing the perception of what a good front yard is; transforming a street, that is seen to be a good looking street.

What can we do to integrate the GLA with communities?

In terms of funding, I wonder about other London based funders where there is some kind of priority; maybe some of the criteria have evolved in terms of integration. We bid for various pots of money, some are clunkier than others, might be different than UK objectives.

Two more questions. What resources you can offer to the GLA? Assistance you can offer? Our policies must be based on evidence.

There is a massive amount of information out there including best practice and case studies.

Team London is coming up with things, a citizen's group.

Volunteers as well.

Team London provides that.

Not just about you are going out and delivering it. Programmes as well.

Grassroots as well.

Never had applications before. Really small, 5000, but this can do a lot of good things. We don't get many applications.

We are aware of Tesco doing plastic bags for green space. Do we enable or promote that.

Harnessing the local knowledge of those groups, the country park in Brent, people do share that information. Offering clear easy links to the GLA. Can share easily say 'oh that is the government, do they really want to hear from me?"

Yes and when things are planned there may be issues between here and there, in terms of other organisations having discussions with Talk London certain engagements, and informal consultations between the forming of groups.

A question here, was anyone from Green space London invited?

There were a limited number of invitations.

Would be good.

We need more focused groups on particular issues. Rather than covering the whole gambit.

Today has been useful.

More like healthy streets.

That is a point, we are doing vertical work, how do we do horizontal? We need to make friends with other groups.

You should look at streets and buildings, rather than individuals.

It is that link between; it is about looking at everything holistically. Every policy must consider others, that is how you have other elements incorporated. This needs to be an opening conversation. We never get to talk to other people.

Thank you for contributions. We will wrap up. How do we mainstream these things?

Through leadership, connectivity.

ENDS