

Extract from the Minutes of Sustainable Hackney's 7th Annual General Meeting 7.00 pm Wednesday 27th June 2018 at Rhodes Estate Community Centre, London E8 3SY

DEEP GREENING HACKNEY

This theme was selected as a commitment to developing a 'Green Infrastructure Plan' was included in the Labour Party's manifesto for the Council 2018 – 2022.

An overview of greening infrastructure - Mireille Tchapi, Research Fellow, University of Westminster Faculty of Architecture and Built Environment

In introducing her overview, Mireille said that planning and strategy on development at various scales from neighbourhood to metropolis and beyond involving stakeholders was essential. Greening the infrastructure involves the whole landscape, blue and green, small spaces, building up to include all that occupies the land.

Developing a plan provides opportunities to bring knowledge of ecology, urban design, humans relation to land and environment: how can it be designed to be sustainable?

It is important because the benefits for human and environmental well-being lead to combined gains.

There is potential for different groups to work together at different scales in an overall framework.

What can guide us in developing this?

- **Key values**
 - Combining sustainability, human resilience, social and economic context leading to a more comprehensive approach.
 - Different and multiple inputs and negative trade offs worked through the comprehensive participatory approach to achieve site specific solutions.
 - Blue-green infrastructure: high quality green spaces connected, water at different scales, respond to guidance and the Millenium Assessment that ecosystem services are mostly declining.
- **Provisioning services**
 - Energy outputs, food, medicines: which natural services can help humans?
 - How can different scales from neighbourhoods to bigger scales link up and develop? For example, from one community garden to a network of community gardens for production of different types of food and medicines and use wider knowledge. Asian plant medicines are very important.
 - How can these different levels be negotiated?
- **Regulatory Services**
 - Factor in regulators of air quality, soil fertility, flooding, disease control, carbon sequestration, waste water, soil erosion

- **Supporting Services**

- Nutrient and water cycles and habitat for species
- Human well-being and physical health and appreciation. Visual access as well as physical access leads to reduction in stress.
- Spiritual experience. Sense of place and belonging – all this is backed up by evidence.

So how do we combine it all? Operating at a local community scale will mean that not everything is covered as not all will be applicable. For example, carbon sequestration at neighbourhood level is not significant but combining neighbourhoods will be different.

The problem could be approached by focusing on a selection of services, for example:

- at neighbourhood level: food production, water for irrigation and potable water, plus looking at water supports psychological well-being
- heat mitigation: vegetation can create a microclimate
- erosion control.

How should we scale the services? What is the applicable scale for the climate in the urban context? This will filter what we can do effectively at a local level.

Any informal green space is important along with woodlands at borough scale, wetlands, green corridors, waterways, cycle ways. We need to scale fauna and flora to that acceptable to people. What wildness will be acceptable? This can be a source of conflict.

Some strategies will need to be adapted/'retrofitted' to support multiple functions.

Building on GLA and other authorities' plans

- Kathryn Johnson, Sustainable Hackney

Kathryn had stepped up to speak on this at the last minute. The Steering Group tried very hard to get someone from a local authority that has already developed a GIP without success. We have received lots of offers of help in the course of trying.

Kathryn said first, that it is just so important to recognise the limitations of a GIP. This is just one part of **Greening Infrastructure, of making our city sustainable**. In the scale of measures that need to be worked out and acted upon, this has not even begun. So long as Heathrow expansion and Crossrail 2 go ahead, so long as foreign investment is sloshing around in our housing market driving up rents and house prices, our city has no chance of even starting in the right direction.

Secondly, all the indications are that the compactness of a city, the density of habitation is key to improving efficiency in energy and materials use, so we must not allow the green belt to be breached.

Kathryn said many local authorities have already developed Green Infrastructure Plans: [Aire Valley](#), [Birmingham](#), [Cambridgeshire GI Strategy](#), [Cornwall Council](#), [Devon County Council](#), [Harrogate Borough Council](#), [Leeds City Region](#), [London - Green Infrastructure Task Force report](#), [London Branch of the UK Landscape Institute](#), [Manchester](#), [North East Wales](#), [Cheshire and the Wirral](#), [Wakefield](#), [York GI Strategy](#), [Yorkshire and Humberside](#), Mansfield, Northampton, Bathnes, Harrogate, SE Dorset, Warwickshire, West Norfolk, Bristol and

Newcastle too someone pointed out. This allows Hackney to take advantage of earlier work.

Kathryn said she had looked in more detail at the plans for four key urban areas that may have elements in common with Hackney: London, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham.

London is already a green city, with over 47% of its area classified as green or blue, and with over 8 million trees. But potential benefits that green infrastructure can provide have been largely under-appreciated and unrealised.

Under the London Infrastructure Plan, the Mayor established a Green Infrastructure Task Force. They produced ['Natural Capital: Investing in a Green Infrastructure for a Future London'](#). We need to remember that this was prepared under Boris Johnson as Mayor of London and by his senior environment and energy adviser, Matthew Pencharz, who explained in the Guardian ['Why the London Pension Fund Authority can't accept the call to divest from fossil fuels'](#). He said that the transition to a low-carbon economy has to be gradual, not sudden, that in the *medium* term we are going to need fossil fuels to keep the lights on.

We can agree with much of what Matthew Pencharz said in the foreword: that “we need to make far better use of green infrastructure to meet the challenge of London’s growing population. We need to plan, design and manage it better as a network, rather than simply as separate elements”, that “this will only be achieved with a better appreciation of the benefits green infrastructure provides”, that the work of the Task Force revealed gaps in what we know about London’s green infrastructure, that we don’t yet understand the full potential of a well-managed green infrastructure to help address London’s future environmental and social challenges. Therefore the Task Force set out where more information is needed, how to make a better business case for investing in green infrastructure can be made, work underway to develop new accounting methods and new ways to distribute funding and govern the network at different scales.

But this limited perspective on green infrastructure is reinforced by a Vision that “a high quality and well-maintained green infrastructure is integral to keeping the city healthy, happy, moving and functioning” and a target set way into the future: **“By 2050, all neighbourhoods will be able to benefit from, enjoy, and take pride in London’s green infrastructure!!!”**

The report sets goals for 2050:

- an integrated green infrastructure network
- all regeneration areas and major new developments will include green infrastructure
- many streets, including high streets, will be transformed into greener areas of public realm
- more of London’s hidden rivers will have been removed from pipes or concrete channels
- all Londoners will have accessible, good quality green infrastructure nearby that they can take pride in
- green infrastructure decisions will be based on natural capital valuation

In other words, this plan really focuses on green spaces and more or less as an afterthought says they will “explore how the grey infrastructure of our streets and public realm could be greened”, the focus is still London *world* city and the timetable – 2050 – is inordinately long.

If there is attention to how the ecosystem can support 11 million people then it deeper in the document than Kathryn had time to delve.

Manchester consulted on their 'Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy' in 2015. (final version not found). In summary:

- new green infrastructure will need to continue to be an integrated part of City's growth
- a framework for scaling up this work and the basis for driving new investment over the coming decade is needed
- the plan reframes this action in the context of the city's objectives for growth, public sector reform and the creation of attractive places where people will choose to live, work, visit and invest
- the vision for green and blue infrastructure in Manchester over the next 10 years is:
 - By 2025 high quality, well maintained green and blue spaces will be an integral part of all neighbourhoods.
 - communities will be living healthy, fulfilled lives, enjoying access to parks and greenspaces and safe green routes for walking, cycling and exercise throughout the city. Businesses will be investing in areas with a high environmental quality and attractive surroundings, enjoying access to a healthy, talented workforce.
 - New funding models will be in place, ensuring progress achieved by 2025 can be sustained and provide the platform for ongoing investment in the years to follow.
- Four objectives were established to enable the vision to be achieved:
 - Improve the quality and function of existing green and blue Infrastructure, to maximise the benefits it delivers
 - Use appropriate green and blue infrastructure as a key component of new developments to help create successful neighbourhoods and support the city's growth
 - Improve connectivity and accessibility to green and blue infrastructure within the city and beyond
 - Improve and promote a wider understanding and awareness of the benefits that green and blue infrastructure provides to residents, the economy and the local environment

They also want all stakeholders in the city to understand how and where they can play their part in its delivery, and enjoy the benefits that will come as a result.

The driver for this document is economic growth. The focus seems to be creating a pleasant environment that is an attractive location for businesses and the workforce rather than work out how to live within environmental limits and support the ecosystem to deliver the services needed.

Leeds City Region produced a Green Infrastructure Strategy in August 2010. (The Region comprises the cities and districts of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield, Barnsley, York, Craven, Harrogate and Selby and includes part of North Yorkshire.)

The strategy recognises that both in the United States and the UK there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the multiple benefits that can flow from restored, enhanced and

integrated natural systems. It also recognises that to secure these benefits, you have to make ambitious choices on how best to prioritise investment to shape the health, wealth and identity of our future communities. This reference to foreign expertise isn't apparent in London's report despite the world city profile.

The strategy says that green infrastructure is increasingly seen as a smarter alternative to simply upgrading aging grey infrastructure and recognises that this requires a deliberate re-planning of our urban landscape. Water is used as an example: with more erratic patterns of rainfall and greater urbanisation, surface run-off is set to increase exponentially. The ageing sewer networks will be unable to cope in a generation or two. Many cities in the States are starting to implement coordinated urban greening programmes to gradually replace grey with green. Such measures include reestablishing tree cover, increasing the permeability of surfaces, restoring riparian corridors and reinstating natural flood plains to dramatically alter storm water flows. If Philadelphia, Washington and Chicago can do it, why not Leeds, Bradford and Halifax?

They recognise a future where considering the environmental limits and opportunities of the natural environment is ever more critical and green infrastructure has demonstrated it can provide a wide range of benefits.

Their mission is "to develop an internationally recognised city-region; to raise our economic performance; to spread prosperity across the whole of our city region, and to promote a better quality of life for all of those who live and work here." And, in order to deliver this mission, they recognise they "cannot afford not to invest in and plan for green infrastructure. Our natural environment is not a helpful by-product of economic growth but a fundamental driver and shaper of that growth." They "know that green infrastructure is a value generator, not a costly add-on. Investing in green infrastructure will not only help the city region out of the recession in the short term; it will also support our ambitions to become a low carbon, sustainable economy and continue to attract quality businesses and create jobs for many years to come." "The Leeds City Region has commissioned the Green Infrastructure Strategy to ensure that future growth is underpinned and supported by high quality green infrastructure."

So, again the whole perspective, the driver is economic growth and this strategy does not incorporate environmental limits and resilience of the ecosystem.

But does incorporate

- Addressing climate change adaptation
- Tackling flood alleviation and water management
- Improving quality of place
- Improving physical and mental health and social well-being
- Improving skills and educational attainment
- Increasing land and property values
- Sustaining economic growth and investment
- Improving labour force productivity
- Increasing tourism
- Enhancing recreational and leisure opportunities
- Protecting and enhancing landscape character and biodiversity
- Obtaining products from the land

While focusing on economic growth, this strategy has a far stronger grasp of what is needed environmentally than Manchester and a clearer understanding of the relationship between grey and green infrastructure than London's report.

Much the freshest most inspiring is **Birmingham**, who produced their plan '*Making Birmingham Green' Green Spaces Living Plan*' in September 2013. Birmingham's ambition is to be one of the world's leading green cities. They see that some progress has been made in the last few years but they need to accelerate their plans and measure themselves internationally against other leading green cities such as Stockholm and Copenhagen in Europe, Portland in the USA, and be a partner in the development of green innovations being driven forward in China.

The plan recognises they are facing energy and resource shortages and dramatic climate change impacts and that they need a new approach, that of valuing all the city's natural spaces and features as Natural Capital, by applying the latest scientific thinking behind the National Ecosystem Assessment.

Through their 'Green Vision for Birmingham', this Green Living Spaces Plan becomes the vehicle through which the City can adopt a comprehensive approach to Natural Capital, as a thread that must run through all its future considerations, for the economy, its spatial planning, its health care and its low carbon future.

They say that no other UK city has undertaken such a comprehensive combined evaluation and mapping exercise. This exercise produced a totally new map series of the city that shows their current relationship with the natural environment - what nature gives us for free (ecosystem services) and where in the city the supply of these services is not meeting the multiple challenges or demands made upon it. "It is these new evidence bases that the city must work with, in the near future with all its stakeholders, public, private and citizens to collectively address these leading green city challenges."

In other words the environment, the ecosystem and the limits provide the base from which all else must be worked out. The plan recognises that '*Making Birmingham Green*' is also about "changing the way they do things: joining up agendas, agencies, services, users and funding; and re-positioning the importance of Parks" and the "Plan's seven principles will help shape all future development in the city as they will be enacted through the draft Your Green and Healthy City SPD".

This is more like the Green Infrastructure Plan we need for Hackney.

The Chair drew attention to the relationship between the contributions: Mireille summarised what is needed but Kathryn analysis shows that local authorities are not necessarily delivering.

Building on local work

- **John Little, Green Roofs and Clapton Park Grounds Contractor**

John Little told us he looks after Clapton Park housing estate and green roofs but that he would now like to be known for social housing green estates. Everyone knows the importance of green space and people being involved. Now the importance of maintenance and valuing those who look after them needs to be recognised. But it doesn't happen.

Funding cannot be shifted to maintenance though the latter is more important than the infrastructure. It is just not possible to do the necessary maintenance with just volunteers, no matter how good they are. If there is no people with responsibility for maintaining the green infrastructure then a guy comes along with a strimmer later and devastates it. Doing it properly makes the job more satisfactory. At present we don't have a gardener but a guy with ear defenders on, shutting out his surroundings.

At Clapton Park the Tenant Management Organisation has allowed flexibility, a bit of give and take so that if you are planting or looking after them and not cutting the grass, that's ok.

We need to add space. Mostly this will be green roofs. John's bugbear: if you're doing it, do one that works and lasts. That's much better!

Habitat, plants and soils need to be got onto and into everyday stuff like bin shelters, lamp posts, crash barriers – make them function as habitat, places for interpretation. Invertebrate habitat will fit into all this. And it's not much of a jump to make it more exciting.

A big problem for creating biodiversity in public space is that a new development is finished off by spreading rich top soil around it. This must be stopped! We continually underestimate the impacts of our disturbance. It is poor soil that creates more diversity. Use the construction waste instead, leave it there. That will be a much better base. That will use the waste and result in a more diverse plant community with lower maintenance.

- **Marie Murray and Brian Cummings, Dalston Eastern Curve Garden**

The Garden is in its eighth year and Marie sympathised with Jon's contribution. It is a struggle just to be there. In 2008 the Garden emerged out of top down meets grassroots with some funding from economic regeneration to kick start some green areas. The overground was coming to Dalston, it became an area for intensification and a transport hub. This led to the project '*Making space in Dalston*' in recognition that it was already one of the most densely populated areas with 75% of people having no access to private green space and no public green space.

The project brought together organisations and residents, identified by walking and talking to people in Dalston town centre. There was a small budget and they were looking for a big impact. Rhodes Estate, Princess May School, Ashwin Street, Gillette Square came together with the idea of the time: an ecopark. People were quite angry, raging really and creating argy bargy that so much was being done to them, razing familiar buildings to the ground and putting in new stuff so they gave them some funding to sugar the pill and make it 'nicer' when the new flats came in. There was more 'liveable space' with the increased 'intensification'.

Princess May School had a very harsh environment, a barren front, but the greening and growing project finally became quite successful.

The whole project led to about 70 micro projects on paper and 7-8 were realised. That's quite a high proportion. It was definitely more than a report on a shelf.

Ashwin Street is quite interesting. It was not just about plant more trees but take up the pavement, SUDS more planting as well resulting in a green corridor. It's an inspiration of how things can be. Hackney Council was risk averse and held back some money to fund repaving in case it didn't work. This approach relates to the 'Big Society' to volunteering and what people are supposed to do. People did get stuck in but there was a dip in the

middle period. It's success is down to Café Otto who took on the challenge and made it more collective. It look alright. Keep persevering. Keep on.

The Dalston Curve Garden was the biggest project. It was created in 2010. The original plan couldn't be realised because mechanical diggers found illegal fly tipping. Some was legally disposed of but removing it all would have taken all the money so much was packed down, covered with a layer of rubble and raised beds put in. Can't believe the progress. The trees are amazing and they grow food. And it really relates to Mireille's point about spiritual meaning and a sense of place.

The Garden is managed as a social enterprise. The café raises money to keep the garden open 12 months of the year and supports an education programme. But even more so, it is about what it is to be human, to step through the little door off busy Dalston Lane. Marie still gets such pleasure, a thrill to hear people when they come for the first time. Yes, it is about the environment and biodiversity but it's about that impact on Dalston people. The garden – and Marie and Brian – lurch from one threat to another. And they get ground down by it. But they keep a sense of the values by which the garden was created. It is about care for the environment, people in the environment. The Garden works with Trinity School Year 1s every year. They are hoping to instill in the very young that they can care for things, learn custodianship and ownership, that they made something in the Garden. Their names are on everything and they bring their parents and show them.

Marie and Brian were so upset recently when a big planning application was agreed. They opposed it because of the impact and overshadowing over the Garden. They blogged about why green space is so important in Dalston. They got really depressed about it. But they stick with it because it is so important.

Questions and comments

- Mireille said greening infrastructure is exactly about the Curve Garden. It's always about cost and tangible indicators for the funders but it is very difficult to grasp all the benefits of places with inspirational value and how people feel about them. **Map and list EVERYTHING** – all the services – social, cultural; map the potential of different activities, map the physical aspects, the initiatives, the response to activities. Then you can see the connectivity and impact beyond the physical green-blue. Do some collective brainstorming to capture it.
- **10x greener campaign:** where is it going? What events? Can it be replicated? Will there be guidelines and a tool kit? John was sceptical initially because of the BBC pushing the campaign. Always more emphasis on infrastructure and little for maintenance. So their was pressure to create something for after, to find some independent funding. Replication needs both start-up money and maintenance – there must be an after care guarantee. In Daubeny there are divides in the community and it is important to get rid of them; for transport reasons take care where to put the divisions. More commitment from the estate side was needed to improve working.
- **Estates** are large spaces with perimeters but there is a loss of control and much is being built on. What can we do to make the Council keep the space? The purpose of the GI Plan is **NOT** to stimulate economic development.
- **We live in a highly centralised state** where local authorities have diminishing powers and diminishing finances. When the people of Manchester opposed fracking, the Secretary of State opposed them.

- **There's a lot of talk about green spaces but not about the grey spaces**, motor ehicles, roads, traffic. These lead to air pollution, health impacts, hospitalisations. Huge space is devoted to care. Hackney has low car ownership. There are opportunities to close roads and create different spaces. ... Play streets and schools streets. Lambeth is talking about digging up streets and putting a cycle lane down the middle.
- **Green – blue: most blue is controlled by Thames Water.** We need to take bac control/ownership of local drainage. Re-municipalise.
- People liked the idea of leaving the rubble so you can have more wild flowers but pointed out the importance of growing food. Most estates have neither, just mown grass. We could take more of this land and turn it into community gardens and for food growing. There is a 12 year waiting list for allotments. You can also have a diversity of activities, people growing, BBQ and pond.
- Green Infrastructure Plan: push for more quid pro quo so every new development has a ratio or quota of green space, green roofs/walls. It must be green space where people can connect and meet. Housing is critical but can have a terrible effect so there must be recognition of the value of green space and its relationship with the building.
- Before the Garden biodiversity may have been greater than now and the more popular the garden is the harder it is. It was suggested that Marie and Brian get an entomologist in to assess the Garden's biodiversity and advise.
- Kathryn and John differed over the Green Belt with Kathryn saying that energy and material flows could be optimised in more compact areas and John saying the space was needed for housing with associated green space.
- See the Landworkers Alliance [*'Recommendations for a Post-Brexit Agricultural Policy'*](#)
- Tenant controlled estates offer many possibilities. Protect the space by making it valued.
- Case study: district of Taipei. All residents are attached to green spaces which are managed bottom up.
- Connectivity relate each green space to neighbourhoods and map them. Emphasise the local value of local parks. Negotiate and pressure so developers have to respect the space.
- Map space on very local level – food growing areas, vegetable beds, etc so they have to be included in plans.
- London National Park City campaign – 2019 it will happen. 22/7 – lots of events celebrating green spaces and a map will be created.

A Greening Infrastructure Working Group will be set up to develop this work and influence the GIP. Please get involved. First meeting will be in the Autumn and info will be posted on the website.