

The Land Trust's response to the Mayor of London's strategy – A City for All Londoners

Introduction

The Land Trust welcomes this initiative, which provides a well-balanced and well-judged summary of the key issues and a valuable platform for more detailed plans of action. In this context we are also pleased to see the recognition given to the value of the environment and green space play in delivering a wide range of benefits local communities and wider society.

To put our response into context, the Land Trust is a national land management charity that secures long term investment for managing parks and green public open spaces in perpetuity. Our business model enables us to provide a range of funding options that secure high quality and sustainably maintained open spaces that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits.

We believe, and our experience and research increasingly demonstrates, that the value of parks and green spaces are increasingly vital to a growing London. In particular, parks and green spaces:

- are vital for people's health and well-being, bringing people together, improving physical and mental health;
- play important roles in contributing to society and local and national economies;
- are key to ensuring our environment is resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- require sustainable investment, which will cost less in the longer term.
- are well used and highly valued by people, as evidenced by many surveys we and others have conducted

We have ownership and or long term management responsibility for over 2,000 hectares of land with more than 60 sites across England and continue to grow with a pipeline of over 3,000 hectares currently. In London the Land Trust manages a range of sites, including the Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park and Southern Park in Greenwich and Beam Parklands in Dagenham.

Our vision is to improve the quality of people's lives by creating sustainable, high quality green spaces that deliver economic, environmental, educational, health and social benefits in local communities. We achieve this through working with developers and landowners to provide solutions for their undevelopable land.

In response to the document, the Land Trust would offer some principles as to how a way forward may be achieved that delivers the Mayoral objectives. These include:

- Whilst green space is important locally and its value in place making is critical, its strategic role and value for London should also be recognised. It is clear that quality management of green space can deliver significant benefits.
- Larger connected green infrastructure delivers well-being and health benefits especially for deprived communities.
 - Those who live within 500 metres of accessible greenspace are 24% more likely to meet recommended levels of physical exercise (DEFRA).
 - Poor air quality in London is a major health issue and greenspace can contribute significantly to delivering solutions.
- We welcome the concept of good growth but would urge an approach that considers each site on its own merits – we are concerned specifically at the prospect of automatically losing valuable “brownfield” sites (for instance in biodiversity terms or in areas lacking in green spaces) through the new planning rules or to aid climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- The scale and pace of growth may be such that some existing urban areas need to be radically re-planned and we would hope that a variety of new greenspaces will be incorporated at the earliest stages of master-planning in these cases
- We support the need for London to accommodate its growth within its own boundaries and we therefore support protection of green belts in principle although there may be cases where boundary adjustments could benefit communities. Higher density living in some areas and possibly use of larger existing greenspaces may be intensified, so we encourage all new schemes to provide their own additional parks and open spaces rather than simply rely on other existing green spaces.
- The pressure to deliver increasing numbers of housing units should not be allowed to undermine place making which is key to London’s future success.
- There may be possible losses of open spaces within larger more contiguous open areas which are potentially of much greater value to the environment/society; there may be some circumstances where greenbelt boundaries might be extended to protect these areas of unprotected greenspace or where say extensive employment land use is rationalised and converted to other uses, such as housing, as an alternative.
- We recognise that many of the benefits to be derived from well-functioning greenspaces can only be achieved by high quality management and ensuring that the necessary structures, governance and funding mechanisms are put in place to ensure that they have a secure, sustainable long-term future. This is something specifically where we believe the Land Trust can help, especially as it complements our place making agenda.
- We urge consideration of greenspace within a context of a rapidly changing local authority role – there is a need for innovative models for how greenspaces can be safeguarded and substantial returns can be generated for society for every £1 spent on greenspace
 - Please see our own Social Return on investment study as an example, where for every £1 per annum we spend on our green spaces, society benefits the equivalent of £30 per annum in health care provision¹

¹ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf>

- Empowered communities are essential in maintaining and managing sustainable green spaces, however it is important that the necessary structures are put in place to safeguard them from risk.

For further information about the Land Trust, please visit www.thelandtrust.org.uk

Turning to the document, we would comment as follows:

Part 1 - Accommodating Growth

We feel that this section recognises greenspaces as valuable and emphasises maintaining and enhancing existing greenspaces. However London is expecting significant population growth which will require more, not less greenspace to be safeguarded and protected. Apart from alleviating pressure on existing green spaces, there needs to be a focus on place making to build communities rather than simply delivering ever greater numbers of homes. Greenspace is one of the main factors that underpins place making.

Growth will need to address the impact of climate change. Whilst measures to control traffic and switch modes may help tackle localised air pollution in transport corridors, greenspace also needs to be factored into large scale new developments. Greenspace is not only vital for health and well-being but also to help safeguarding (flood risk) and adaptation of communities providing SUDS and a means to reduce carbon in a wider sense.

Within the section dealing with Infrastructure for People and Communities – there is no mention of the vital role and value of public open space, including creating and enhancing opportunities for improving health and well-being, bringing communities together and engaging with an ageing population. Our model of locally managed greenspace allows better integration with engagement across a range of community groups.

Refer to <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/LT-response-to-LA-Housing-Committee-inquiry-Sept-2016.pdf>

Part 2 Housing – Whilst building homes on public land, often at transport hubs should deliver significant and much needed housing, especially at high densities, these schemes should include creation or safeguarding of well managed additional green areas to deliver a range of benefits. Reliance simply on existing open spaces will lead to their intensification and over-use placing a burden on public or other bodies in maintaining them. Over time they will also come under pressure to be redeveloped so the point here is to use housing schemes as a catalyst to increase greenspace to provide better place making.

High density housing was built across many UK cities in the 1960s following slum clearance schemes but these new schemes were often let down by poorly planned greenspace that was rapidly neglected through a lack of quality management. Large swathes of grass may be easier to maintain but this does not add to the experience of communities setting up in new places. Quality design and management of such public space will be key to their success.

Furthermore, whilst increasing the stock of rented accommodation and the greater trend towards transient populations, there needs to be a focus on community engagement – this is often provided by parks, and connecting people to nature within their local areas – as such, a vital role within society.

The rush to accommodate new Londoners over the next few decades as the population rises to c 11m and beyond should generate a proactive approach to greenspace provision. Master-planning should not treat greenspace as an afterthought, of space left behind but rather should be the key infrastructure as much as transport corridors. Housing Zones should lead integration of greenspace, transport and place making in order to deliver the long term benefits. Low cost housing must not be equated with a low cost environment – it is critical that planners are given the resources to establish, understand and demand the appropriate standards. In addition, low cost housing areas in particular should be given food growing capability with community orchards and allotments.

Whilst a significant proportion of greenspace in Greater London is not in public ownership, urban areas should set out to maximise the provision of accessible connected public greenspace such as South London's woodlands.

Proximity to greenspace has significant health benefits, for example, living near open space is valued at £300 pa per person whilst the costs of inactivity to the public purse is estimated to be £8.3bn per annum nationally in England (Dept of Health) or c. £150 pa per person.

Using brownfield sites for development can also be costly, especially if there are contaminated land issues. In addition, brownfield sites undisturbed for years have often proven to be important refuges for ecology, for example our site Canvey Wick in Essex² and Oliver Road Lagoon also in Essex³. Measures to increase housing stock on brownfield sites may need expensive mitigation.

Overall, this section does not reference the importance of access to open space and the quality of its management for the benefit of all; there may not be enough open space in some areas to serve either existing or extra population. London's predicted growth needs to be accommodated within its boundaries in order to not move into Green Belt whilst not just generating high density with minimal open space provision in new housing.

² <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/space/canvey-wick/>

³ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/space/oliver-road-lagoons/>

Part 3 Economy –

The Land Trust believes that green spaces uplift local economies as well as contribute to the wider economy. In terms of local economic benefit, green spaces do not only enhance an area to attract inward investment and increase land value, but well maintained green spaces can be used as places of learning and development, where people can gain new skills and build confidence to find employment. We believe that it is important, therefore, to recognise how green space plays a part in economic development.

For example, the Land Trust has experience of using its greenspace assets to develop skills and employment opportunities through local community based initiatives, such as [the Land Trust's Green Angels training programme](#)⁴. Whilst locally, many residents who joined the training courses were unemployed initially, of those actively seeking employment, 44% found employment under the programme, providing them with transferable skills and helping them develop personally, structure and discipline.

Another example is the park ranger at Beam Parklands, who began as a volunteer, and eventually built up experience, skills and confidence to apply for a post as ranger at the park. Read her story...⁵

Climate Change is recognised in the economy section – in relation to the importance of natural capital, such as green and blue infrastructure in making towns and development more resilient and providing a low carbon future to counter changing climates.

Greenspace can play a pivotal role and we believe this needs to be made more clear. It is important to consider a wider toolkit that considers more than flood risk mitigation, but fully integrates greenspace, with low carbon and natural capital considerations being applied where possible.

Across London, there are also many industrial areas which occupy large spaces and which could be transformed into more efficient layouts enabling co-existence of housing and employment uses.

Part 4 Environment - Environment and public space should underpin all key topics in the document, and NOT just be seen as a transport based issue. Air quality issues may predominate in certain transport congestion hotspots but may also be of wider extent

⁴ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/the-land-trust-charitable-aims/education-and-learning/green-angels-project-at-festival-gardens/>

⁵ <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/pdfs/AnnualReport201516/AnnualReport201516.html#p=16>

depending on other factors, such as concentration of land uses and topographical features. Therefore, a more robust approach is necessary, to link with housing, employment and land.

Larger green areas can provide buffer zones for communities faced with heavy traffic pressures. Better connected greenspaces are able to provide a whole range of goods and services and also provide economies of scale – the context of the All London Green Grid is still important.

Population levels are now higher than ever before in London and there will be high intensification in many areas in inner and outer London. We welcome a modal shift, such as to cycling, that can encourage more direct routes through greenspaces, rather than major routes. Therefore, it is hoped that green infrastructure can be funded through development related subsidies, such as through S106/CIL.

Part 5 references the healthier living of Londoners in the future

There is a significant body of evidence supporting the role parks and green open spaces have in delivering this for communities. The Local Government Association recognises the benefits of outdoor exercise and is calling on NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups to drive forward a strategy for GPs to prescribe “green prescriptions”. The King’s Fund (2013) estimates increasing access to parks and open spaces could reduce NHS costs of treating obesity by more than £2billion.

As London grows and in places, densifies, the services provided by greenspace will be ever more important, such as provision of shade and shelter, reducing urban heat island effects, improving air quality by reducing pollution, helping alleviate flooding, storing water, reducing noise and contamination. As an example, grass surfaces exposed to sun may be 24 degrees cooler than concrete (Cardiff University), whilst tree shade may lower air temperature by 5-7 degrees Celsius.

The UK Natural Environment Assessment found that if the UKs ecosystems are properly cared for they could add an extra £30 billion a year to the national economy, but if neglected the downside effects can also be severe. In one city’s recent study for every £1 spent in the parks there is a return of c £12 in social, environmental and economic benefits.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that the natural environment is embedded into this section as well as all other sections, with clear actions for implementation, in order to ensure Londoners become healthier and more resilient in the future.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Land Trust welcomes this aspirational document.

Delivering its key themes notably a healthier, more resilient London, will depend on an integrated and strategic approach to greenspace design, management and use. This will help create a resilient city as well as adapting to meet the challenges of climate change and population growth. Connecting communities notably through the medium of locally loved greenspaces is key to continuing to create the foundations of a fairer more diverse London.

Not to be forgotten is the reality that much of London is still dominated by a strong sense of places, through its origin as a collection of local villages which sustained its character and through applying this perspective of place, the well-being of its citizens can be sustained.

Therefore, the key message here is that more parks, greenspaces and green infrastructure are needed, not less, and cumulatively these places need to be prioritised even more with high quality management resources. They must continue to perform these diverse services for all Londoners to contribute to London's future character and cohesion.

It is not just providing parks and wildlife areas that will be pivotal to London's success but flood storage, recreation, education and public health and so forth. Quality management of greenspaces can transform places and key to this is the unique funding method that Land Trust can deploy, often working hand in hand with communities, developers and landowners.

With London due to experience continued growth greenspaces will become increasingly pressured although with innovative design and secured income these areas can still work for biodiversity and people. Transformational places that provide multifunctional space will become increasingly important. Greenwich Ecology Park provides an example of how connectedness to nature can help transform a high density urban setting with spin off benefits such as better health, educational resources and knock on effects on value uplift.

Maintaining this mosaic of human habitats as well as delivering greater biodiversity and connectedness to nature will be part of the proof of London's continuing success.

We would be happy to provide further details, invite you to visit any of our London green spaces and discuss this with you further.