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| London Councils’ TEC Executive Sub Committee | | | | | | | |
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| Green Infrastructure Partnerships | | | | | | Item no: | 07 |
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| Report by: | Jennifer Sibley | | Job title: | | Principal Policy Officer | | |
| Date: | 21 July 2016 | | | | | | |
| Contact Officer: | Jennifer Sibley | | | | | | |
| Telephone: | 020 7934 9829 | Email: | | Jennifer.sibley@londoncouncils.gov.uk | | | |
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| **Summary** | This report provides members with the recommendations made as part of the Mayor’s Green Infrastructure Taskforce that affect boroughs and TEC, and sets out suggestions on how they could be achieved. |
| **Recommendations** | TEC Executive is asked to:   * Note and discuss the report. In particular;   + Consider whether lobbying on the new London Plan and for locally set planning fees is the right approach to see green infrastructure ‘mainstreamed’ in London;   + Provide a steer on whether surveying boroughs and asking the GLA for an annual assessment of green infrastructure should happen. |



**Introduction**

1. Green Infrastructure is a term that recognises that trees, planting and parks provide a greater service than amenity benefits alone. Green infrastructure encompasses the full range of greening; from parks, trees and flower beds to swales, green walls, rain gardens and green roofs. The benefits and services provided by green infrastructure include air quality improvements, biodiversity benefits, protecting the city from the urban heat effect by providing shade, and reducing flood risk by capturing rainfall in more natural ways, reducing surface water run-off and ‘flash flooding’.
2. In March 2016 TEC members received a report entitled Mayor’s Green Infrastructure Taskforce. This report provided members with information about the Taskforce, its focus and its recommendations, including those that were for boroughs and London Councils to consider.
3. The recommendations for boroughs and London Councils were:

#15 London boroughs should ensure that the concept of green infrastructure is central to a placemaking agenda and properly represented within their placemaking teams.

#17 Boroughs should support sub-regional green infrastructure partnerships. These partnerships should be funded by the Greater London Authority matched by an allocation from the boroughs, for example, from savings generated through the reduction in the levy achieved by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority over the past five years.

#16 The Greater London Authority, London Councils and the Environment Agency should review existing relevant partnerships to identify opportunities for better collaboration and co-ordination of green infrastructure.

#19 London Councils’ Transport and Environment Committee should take a stronger role in promoting, co-ordinating and supporting green infrastructure.

1. In response to the recommendations, the report TEC members received in March 2016 set out the following in paragraph 12 to 17.
2. *Recommendation 15 is one we welcome and we note that some boroughs are making great strides in ‘greening’ developments in their borough, and ensuring that adequate green space and drainage provision is considered. With pressures on savings to be made, it will remain challenging for planning teams to be adequately resourced to negotiate with developers, and for flooding teams to respond to the development proposals and insist on changes where appropriate.*
3. *Recommendations 17 links to Recommendation 16 as flooding sub-regional partnerships already exist and we would assume that strengthening these partnerships would be a better focus rather than creating brand-new green infrastructure partnerships.*
4. *London Councils officers could undertake a review of the flooding sub-regional partnerships together with the Environment Agency, and bring the results to TEC. This would be a voluntary review, as TEC does not have any statutory powers in the area of flooding in boroughs.*
5. *London Councils officers, using existing networks, could survey borough officers about whether green infrastructure is integrated in placemaking teams and bring the results to TEC, but again, TEC has no statutory powers in the area of planning and placemaking in boroughs.*
6. *TEC could request an annual report from the GLA about the uptake of green infrastructure in planning applications and the creation of new green space, for example if an equivalent scheme to the current Mayor’s Pocket Parks initiative continues. However, this is not likely to give a particularly strategic overview of green infrastructure as it will be limited to interventions that the Mayor is involved in, and will miss initiatives created or supported by Business Improvement Districts, boroughs themselves and voluntary or community organisations.*
7. *London Councils officers could organise annual events for Members and/or officers on green infrastructure to help share knowledge, expertise and get latest updates on the issues.*
8. At the TEC meeting on 23 March 2016 members highlighted that they did not think that green infrastructure should be added to the responsibility of flood sub-regional partnerships, and that a further report would come to the TEC Executive for further discussion on implementing the report’s other recommendations.
9. An event called ‘Greening your borough’ was planned for 16 June 2016 but was cancelled due to low take-up.

**Considering the recommendations further**

1. The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee recently noted that the government has not mandated the inclusion of sustainable drainage systems in new developments despite recommendation in the Pitt Review that sustainable drainage be the default option for new developments.[[1]](#footnote-1)
2. With the upcoming review of the London Plan, London Councils could call for an increased focus on implementing sustainable drainage in new developments through the planning system. This could provide a stronger foundation for the work that boroughs are already doing through the planning process, where flood risk officers review planning applications that are in areas at high risk of flooding and seek to ensure developers include mitigation measures, including sustainable drainage.
3. Officers regularly comment that the time taken to review planning applications and work with developers to get schemes amended to include adequate sustainable drainage is far beyond what is paid by developers in planning fees. We continue to call through our planning colleagues for the ability for councils to set planning fees locally, to ensure that the costs of providing a planning service are met by those using it. A properly funded planning service is also more likely to be able to provide a faster service for applicants.
4. Drain London developed under the previous Mayor a draft Sustainable Drainage Action Plan which seeks to reduce the amount of run-off water reaching the sewerage system in London, which is already over capacity. It seeks to retrofit sustainable drainage measures such as green roofs and green walls, highlighting key sectors such as housing associations as partners to work with. TEC Executive discussed the Action Plan at its meeting on 24 November 2015. Boroughs may want to focus on how they can support the delivery of the draft Sustainable Drainage Action Plan.
5. We noted that TEC members felt in March 2016 that flooding sub-regional partnerships were not the right partnerships to be promoting and collaborating on green infrastructure. Having reviewed the landscape of partnerships further, partnerships such as the Wandle Valley Partnership and the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority exist in part of London but already have as part of their purpose the protection and enjoyment of green space and nature.
6. We are aware that at borough level there may be opportunities for boroughs to work in partnership with organisations in their local area, such as Business Improvement Districts, charities or groups that already run parks or community spaces, and housing associations to ‘green’ local areas and secure the long-term future of new or existing green infrastructure assets.
7. London Councils officers have already begun the process of a light-touch review of flooding sub-regional partnerships. This process is dependent on officers being invited to attend the meetings, and so far it is evident that the most notable differences between the partnerships are the number of boroughs involved, member involvement, and the level of strategic discussion that takes place. It will be some time before any conclusions can be drawn from this exercise, but it is presumed to share what works well and not so well with boroughs. This work is supported by the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (TRFCC) and feeds into its focus on building capacity in Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) (all London boroughs) by recruiting additional Advisers to support LLFAs in the development of schemes for capital funding. The TRFCC is also keen to strengthen the flood risk partnerships and encourage collaboration between LLFAs, with a particular focus on having one joint surface water flood reduction scheme per partnership.
8. The two suggestions in paragraphs 9 and 10 (to ask boroughs how well green infrastructure is integrated into placemaking teams; and asking the GLA for an annual assessment of the uptake of green infrastructure) would maintain awareness amongst TEC members as to the level of commitment to greening there is in London, but it should be noted that requesting information from the GLA has the potential to miss privately-backed schemes and those that boroughs have initiated themselves. It would give a picture, but a potentially incomplete picture, of green infrastructure in London. Since this requires action by boroughs and the GLA, it would be helpful to understand from TEC Executive members whether this is something London Councils should pursue.

**Recommendations**

TEC Executive is asked to:

* Note and discuss the report. In particular;
  + Consider whether lobbying on the new London Plan and for locally set planning fees is the right approach to see green infrastructure ‘mainstreamed’ in London;
  + Provide a steer on whether surveying boroughs and asking the GLA for an annual assessment of green infrastructure should happen.

1. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/183/18308.htm#_idTextAnchor036> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)