

London Councils' Transport & Environment Committee Executive

Green Infrastructure in London Item no: 03

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Summary This report provides members with an update on progress on the recommendations for boroughs and London Councils, made as part of the Green Infrastructure Taskforce, since July 2016 as well as an update on current work on green infrastructure.

Recommendations TEC Executive is asked to:

Note and discuss the report.

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. The Green Infrastructure Taskforce reported in December 2015. In March 2016 TEC members received a report entitled Mayor's Green Infrastructure Taskforce. That 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. In July 2016 TEC Executive members received a report that discussed lobbying on locally setting planning fees, borough involvement in achieving the London Sustainable Drainage Action Plan, and updated members on the light-touch review of the flood partnerships that officers were starting to undertake. The report also asked for member comment on whether there was value in seeking to map London's green infrastructure, and whether green infrastructure was integrated into placemaking teams.
4. This report provides members with an update on progress on the recommendations and the wider work on green infrastructure London Councils is undertaking.

Green infrastructure in Placemaking

5. Recommendation 15 of the Green Infrastructure Taskforce was:

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

6. London Councils surveyed borough planning policy officers and flood risk management officers with two separate sets of questions, asking about whether the concept of green infrastructure is familiar to officers and whether, in their view, green infrastructure is central to placemaking.
7. Officers from 20 boroughs responded to at least one set of questions with officers from nine boroughs responding to both sets of questions.
8. The responses indicate that green infrastructure as a concept is recognised by every officer who responded. This is a positive indication given the relatively recent increase in use of the concept.
9. In terms of whether green infrastructure is a core part of a borough's placemaking agenda, twelve planning policy officers said it was, with three saying it was not at present but would be (for example because a borough was undertaking a Local Plan review).
10. Eight flood risk management officers felt green infrastructure was a core part of their borough's placemaking agenda, with five saying it was not, one indicating it was important but not a core part, and one was unsure.
11. Many officers were ambitious for their borough, providing information about the strategies that secure green infrastructure, or giving information about the schemes their borough had introduced.
12. These responses indicate a good level of knowledge about green infrastructure but suggest there may be more that some boroughs could do to make green infrastructure

an integral part of their placemaking agenda. The review of policies and strategies offers one such opportunity.

Partnerships for green infrastructure

13. Recommendations 16 and 17 of the Green Infrastructure Taskforce were:

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.

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.

14. As initially reported to TEC Executive in July 2016, London Councils has continued its light-touch review of the seven London sub-regional flood risk management partnerships, as per recommendation 16. This is also usefully informing the wider flooding work that London Councils is undertaking.

15. Emerging themes are:

- a. Not all Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (Thames RFCC) members attend their sub-regional partnership meeting, but where they do not, officers would welcome their attendance. In two partnerships, the Thames RFCC member chairs the partnership meeting.
- b. One partnership hosts alternate officer and officer-member meetings, enabling officers to discuss operational challenges and members to be involved in strategic and partnership discussions. This could be adopted by other partnerships to achieve a suitable balance.
- c. All partnerships are attended by Environment Agency and Thames Water officers, with all partnerships having a dedicated Thames Water contact. Most LLFAs attend their partnership meeting, but not all.
- d. There is a great variety in length of meetings, from half an hour to three hours, depending on the number of boroughs in each partnership. Travel between boroughs can be difficult for officers, depending on local transport links.
- e. Some partnerships are more advanced at joint working than others, whilst some feel like a collection of boroughs working independently.
- f. All partnerships would benefit from better mechanisms for reporting into and from the Thames RFCC, and feedback at present relies on someone at the meeting having attended Thames RFCC meetings, which is not always possible and would mean considerable duplication.
- g. Some partnerships discuss training for officers, some have external contributors, and others can focus very heavily on the detail of specific flooding problems at a certain site. More discipline would be needed from officers were members to attend these meetings.
- h. The majority of partnerships raise the same issues and the same challenges, for example thresholds at which section 19 investigations are triggered, and whether to identify the households affected in public. Negotiating with developers about

sustainable drainage requirements is frequently discussed. London Councils officers have been in a unique position of being able to identify this by attending all the partnership meetings. This suggests there is scope for greater collaboration across the London partnerships and scope for better sharing of knowledge.

16. London Councils officers will work with the Drain London Board, which includes the GLA and Environment Agency, to share the findings of this light-touch review to enable partnerships to better understand what the others are discussing and how they operate.
17. As previously reported to TEC, London Councils does not think that the setting up of new partnerships as proposed by recommendation 17 is realistic, and so we have not progressed this further. At a time of severe financial pressures, we do not believe that savings realised from the reduction in the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority precept are able to be captured for spending elsewhere. Nevertheless, if individual boroughs are able to do this, they could choose to allocate these savings to green infrastructure in their area.
18. Responses from officers discussed in the preceding section suggest that green infrastructure is already a concept both planning policy officers and flood risk management officers are familiar with, which suggests the focus should be on including green infrastructure in new plans and strategies, rather than establishing new partnerships to promote the concept.
19. Separately, the Thames RFCC has recently agreed to fund a pilot looking at delivering large-scale sustainable drainage schemes in London boroughs, and has funded sustainable drainage schemes in at least one London borough. Whilst sustainable drainage is narrower than green infrastructure, this is nevertheless a positive step. Other London boroughs have funded sustainable drainage and green infrastructure schemes directly, and others have used other types funding, such as borough transport funding (LIP funding) to deliver integrated schemes with highways and air quality benefits.

Mapping green infrastructure in London

20. Recommendation 19 of the Green Infrastructure Taskforce was:

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

21. The suggestions brought to TEC in March and July 2016 focused on identifying the data needed to provide TEC with a strategic overview of progress on green infrastructure in London. London Councils has discussed with the GLA the available datasets that could be used to inform TEC members of the strategic picture of green infrastructure in London.
22. The GLA hosts on its website a map of central London's green roofs. This was undertaken in summer 2013 and there are no current plans to update this as it was a manual exercise that was highly time consuming. Remote sensing is a possible future option for mapping green roofs but there is no timescale for this.
23. The GLA is undertaking modelling for a review of the All London Green Grid, which it hopes will act as an evidence base to identify areas where green infrastructure is lacking or where green infrastructure improvements could be made. This could be particularly compelling if there is correlation with air pollution, flood risk or health data indicating poor mental or emotional health. Indicative timescales are spring 2017. London Councils will work with the GLA to understand the potential uses of this dataset when it becomes available.

24. Alongside the publication of the London Sustainable Drainage Action Plan on 13 December 2016, the GLA is crowdsourcing case studies of green infrastructure and sustainable drainage around London as an interactive map.¹ Boroughs have been invited to submit their sustainable drainage or green infrastructure projects that either they have funded or have been secured through the planning process.
25. As such officers feel that the data review the GLA is currently doing on green infrastructure means that London Councils should wait to see the results of this, and not undertake its own survey work of boroughs, as this would be time consuming for borough officers. When the data is in place for London, TEC Executive could then review on an annual basis the provision of green infrastructure in London, and play a role in highlighting where green infrastructure would be most beneficial. This could take the form of an annual update report to TEC Executive, incorporating any other updates on green infrastructure work undertaken by either London Councils or the GLA.

Locally set planning fees

27. London Councils is pursuing this in Parliament and with the support of peers has tabled an amendment to the Neighbourhood Planning Bill.

Recommendations

TEC Executive is asked to:

- Note and discuss the report.

¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/climate-change-weather-and-water/surface-water/sustainable-drainage-london>