

WORKSHOP 4: The Natural Environment

Monday 20th July 2009, 7th Floor, Westminster City Hall

Chairman: Councillor Angela Harvey

Facilitator: Lisa O'Donnell

Officer Panel: Stacey Cougill, Martin Sone, Collette Willis, Tom Kimber, John Wilman, Paul Symmonds

Introduction

Councillor Harvey

Introduced the Natural Environment workshop, explaining that it would cover open space, environment and biodiversity in Westminster. She also explained that all 11 workshop minutes will be on the council's website by the end of September. Further thoughts may be submitted via the website in the mean time.

Lisa O'Donnell

Explained her role as a neutral facilitator, to encourage as many different views as possible. Consensus was not important, and further discussions may be arranged as a result of views put forward. Flipcharts were also on the walls to record views (noted at the end of these minutes).

1. In order to address existing public open space deficiencies and future need, should the City Council seek:

- **Improved public open space in all developments above a certain size threshold and within the areas of open space deficiency only?**
- **Require planning obligation funding for open spaces if open space provision is not possible as part of the development?**
- **Temporary allotments and community gardens on long term vacant sites?**

Tom Kimber
(Westminster City Council)

explained that Open Space was defined in the Core Strategy and Open Space Strategy SPD:

all parks and gardens, regardless of size (whether public or privately owned); the Thames; the Canal; civic spaces; children's playgrounds; ball courts; open spaces in housing estates; and churchyards within the city's boundary. They include open spaces with private or restricted access. Public indoor sports provision, public indoor play areas, and linkages between open spaces are also taken into account. Not included are streets; private residential gardens (although private communal gardens are included); school playgrounds; or purely landscaped areas such as road verges, or strips of perimeter planting around housing estates.

Comments from workshop attendees

It was asked what deficiency means, and explained that all open space has been audited, and areas deficient in types of open space such as that suitable for informal play were assessed. Spaces were assessed on a qualitative basis, and areas deficient were designated not just purely on distance to useable open space, but on ease of getting there, so barriers such as Westway were taken into account.

It was explained that if green roofs are to be counted towards open space that they would need to be accessible by the public.

	<p>The point was made that the Open Space Strategy references the Royal Parks a lot, when the council does not contribute to them financially or functionally.</p> <p>The strategy doesn't show deficiency in south Westminster because of Churchill Gardens, which is a sleight of hand because that space is paid for by the residents of the estate.</p> <p>The council should seek amenity/play/open space/natural habitat throughout Westminster. All developments should be required to provide open space. Green roofs should not be classed as amenity space as the public can't play in or visit them.</p> <p>Green roofs are needed to temper rain run-off.</p> <p>I have seen the plans for Victoria Transport Interchange (VTI) and the amount of open space is small and badly orientated.</p> <p>The minimum size for space for informal play is 0.4 hectares, or about 1 acre.</p> <p>Private residential gardens do not count as open space. Creating a hard standing over front gardens is "permitted development" (planning permission is not required) as long as the material used is porous.</p> <p>Some garden squares are locked away from the public – only accessible to neighbouring residents. Could this issue be looked at? St Georges Sq is open to the public as owned by WCC.</p> <p>Royal Parks are used for all sorts of events these days – barricades, tents and dead grass are regular features. These events are not needed and should be stopped.</p>
Councillor Harvey	RP are not in WCC ownership. RP are directed to raise as much money as possible for themselves.
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>The canal is not shown as open space on the map. (To be checked)</p> <p>Management of space is a great concern. Open space can become a nuisance needing railings, gates to be locked/unlocked. The question is what do you want open space for? They tend to be green spaces with no-one using them.</p> <p>Open space can reduce health inequalities, and have positive effects on circulatory diseases and mental health.</p> <p>Space needs a proper management plan that involves the community and professional horticulturalists.</p> <p>Our Victorian mains in Little Venice are overflowing regularly – we need open space for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS).</p>

Councillor Harvey	Vacant plots could be turned into gardens. Is there potential in such a built up area for temporary allotments and community Gardens?
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>We could make street cycle only access with a square at one end. Pocket parks such as Taunton Place, punctuating the townscape. Take a few car parking spaces out and put trees in.</p> <p>We could have temporary play streets – 6 months every 4 years would be bearable. – i.e. No traffic/parking.</p> <p>Window Boxes can have anything grown in them. Great fun.</p>
Councillor Harvey	Balconies should only be allowed if they are big enough for its occupants to sit around a dining table, to prevent them being used as ugly external storage spaces.
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Planters on the streets are often planted with expensive plants which are then left to die.</p> <p>9 wards are using their ward budget to teach neighbours how to garden, and to set up a tool exchange.</p> <p>We've heard of "adopt a roundabout" – how about "adopt a space" or "adopt a planter"?</p> <p>What should be done with money collected from developers via S106?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planting - On-going maintenance - Greening blank walls – living walls - Its another developer tax. <p>Amenity space should be linked to family units.</p> <p>Plans (e.g. Selbourne House) show trees but there's no room for them to grow.</p> <p>Could art/sculpture be linked to open space – choose which is more appropriate?</p> <p>Roof Gardens should be provided on offices for employees to enjoy.</p>
Councillor Harvey	Because of privacy and noise, should roof terraces be permitted?
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>They should certainly be disguised properly.</p> <p>You shouldn't stop new residents from having a terrace just because you're 'in first'. Everyone has a right to be able to step into the fresh air.</p> <p>Sculptures should be climbable.</p> <p>Fountains are important for biodiversity.</p>
2. How should the City Council prioritise the ecological value of local public open space over accessibility, recreational provision, and commercial undertakings?	

Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Nesting boxes should be provided on new buildings.</p> <p>The council should put contraceptives in pigeon feed.</p> <p>Bring back water fountains – troughs for dogs, bird baths on the top. They are streetscape features with ecological value.</p>
Councillor Harvey	<p>Hedges and grass in the public realm should be visually permeable for security reasons. A child was raped in long grass once. It's down to choice of plants and management.</p>
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>Contributions should be made by developers to a central council fund to ensure standards can be raised adjacent to developments. Councillor – there should be a balance, on a case by case basis, between ecological value and other factors.</p>
<p>3. Should the City Council require features that enhance biodiversity through providing new habitats for wildlife on all new developments above a certain size threshold, or should new development fund (through planning obligations) existing habitats in the vicinity of the development?</p>	
Councillor Harvey	<p>Do we receive reports on biodiversity for e.g. a small redevelopment?</p>
Comments from workshop attendees	<p>We require reports on relevant applications – e.g. where there is a loss of habitat, or a TPO tree.</p> <p>We should encourage the use of bird bricks, to encourage birds to nest.</p> <p>Building under a garden leaving only a few feet of soil doesn't allow the planting of substantial species of tree.</p> <p>Some love and some hate trees. Paul Akers tries to get 'one in one out' but it doesn't always work. People don't bother re-planting.</p> <p>Cutting or mutilating a 10-year old tree because it blocks a view is a terrible reason.</p> <p>Bat and bird boxes are touted as being 'green' What is genuinely 'green'? Some people don't want to live with bats in close proximity.</p> <p>Tree canopies can obscure light from street lights.</p> <p>Paul Akers has accepted artificial planting to discharge a condition requiring the screening of an air conditioning unit on the roof. Natural planting would not have been maintained. There is a niche for it – it was successful. It has a small role to play.</p> <p>I'm against forest scale trees in small residential streets. They are inappropriate in scale and block out the light and obscure architecture.</p> <p>Lime trees drop ghastly stuff.</p>

	<p>Dreaded Plane trees on Grosvenor Road. I lose the sun in my garden from May to November. Because of the rate of growth they are 'lollipopped' every year, and each branch sends out more branches. Ginkgo is much more suitable.</p> <p>The forthcoming council Tree Strategy SPD will look at the 'right tree in the right place'.</p> <p>Please add to that 'right pruning/maintenance'.</p> <p>So we are looking for enhanced biodiversity?</p> <p>Yes.</p>
<p>4. Should the City Council take a firmer approach to protecting the ecological contribution made by residential gardens? If so should this approach apply to all gardens or just larger gardens in certain areas that make an important contribution to habitat and biodiversity?</p>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>People are felling trees to allow unsustainable swimming pools to be built. They should be protected.</p> <p>Can you require a naturally dying tree to be replaced with a live tree?</p> <p>Gardens help temper run off, and new developments should not increase the amount.</p> <p>People should be allowed to have unkempt gardens. Whilst we want gardens to be kept, we also want people to be able to plant and maintain them as they wish.</p>
<p>Councillor Harvey</p>	<p>The quality of air is an issue.</p>
<p>5. Should we only allow vessels of national importance, or have some special maritime or educational interest associated with the specific proposed location on the Thames? Should the policy specifically exclude any further mooring by party-boat, pleasure trip or restaurant cruise vessels, other than transient mooring in the course of navigation?</p>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>The council lost its case in 2007 when it argued that it accepted transient moorings but not permanent party boats. The Inspector did not accept there was a material difference. We now have a collection of party boats.</p> <p>We should resist party boats being moored permanently.</p> <p>Temporarily mooring a boat can't be controlled in planning terms. Permanent mooring and pontoons can be controlled.</p> <p>It would be good to have a range of uses on the boats – galleries/exhibitions etc.</p> <p>There should be party boats.</p>

	<p>The increasing number of boats should stop. People want to see the river itself sometimes.</p> <p>Only architecturally interesting boats should be moored. We don't want plastic party boats lining the Thames. They can be detrimental to historic vista – famous views e.g. paintings. Can this link into the views policies?</p> <p>Shouldn't historic ships be lined up to be moored when poor boats leave?</p> <p>Some boats have advertising on them e.g. Natwest. We need legislation to control adverts on vehicles (Regs refer to vehicles, not vessels...)</p>
<p>6. Is there a role for making better use of the canal network for transportation, both on the water and through the use of towpaths for cycling and walking?</p>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>I support the use of the canal network for transportation purposes.</p> <p>There should be a consistent policy for the length of the canal. Having it well used will make it safer. Cyclists can be a problem. Houseboats also make it safer. Need to support clearing away undergrowth and make it better overlooked.</p> <p>Pedestrians should have a right of way. British cyclists are some of the worst in the world.</p> <p>Increasing pollution could be an issue.</p> <p>Warwick Avenue (Browning Pool) would be ok to moor boats. There needs to be control of effluent, so increased usage shouldn't pollute air or water.</p> <p>You could perhaps widen the canal/make a pool area near Harrow Road?</p> <p>The canal should be used for the removal of spoil etc. The river should be used to transport waste.</p>
<p>7. Should additional moorings be provided on the canal network for tourism and leisure uses or for mixed use development including residential and/or business moorings?</p>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>You would end up with drunken revellers looking for transport. I would support art galleries though.</p>
<p>Councillor Harvey</p>	<p>That's not feasible.</p>
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>There used to be canoeing on the canal, and the Sea Cadets were based at Lisson Green, and then the Beecham Lodge.</p>
<p>Councillor Harvey</p>	<p>Perhaps we should use the natural environment to encourage physical activities?</p>
<p>8. Should we encourage uses in and around the canal to support leisure use, for example, good quality food outlets/café's around Little Venice?</p>	

<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>I'm keen to see Sheldon Square come alive. It's not being used as envisaged and needs a lot of help. Some restaurants have already failed.</p> <p>Areas around Harrow road tie in with the Economic Development Area.</p> <p>S106 should be used for water based education.</p>
<p><i>Other questions (including comments on the wall)</i></p>	
<p>Comments from workshop attendees</p>	<p>3ft of soil when underground extensions occur. Please <u>enforce</u> in Westbourne Neighbourhood.</p> <p>More Green Gyms in open spaces for community use – a combination of managed classes and open use.</p> <p>I think gardening projects for communities are wonderful, with an evidence base for positive health outcomes, social cohesion, physical activity, reduced likelihood of dementia, increased people/life skills. Evidence base in W2 for the positive benefits of using communal land for community garden. Gives older people a sense of community, and younger people a sense of how food gets to their mouths (and what the produce is!)</p>
<p>END</p>	