

Land use planning for A Living Landscape



Planning can safeguard natural systems, green space and wildlife



Cambourne, Cambridgeshire. This new town was designed to incorporate natural features including areas of existing woodland, six ponds and number of old hedges and water-courses (photo: Matthew Roberts)

How can land use planning help to create A Living Landscape?

The planning system is a vital spatial and democratic tool which determines how places develop, taking into account a range of interests. It can ensure that new developments protect and join-up wildlife-rich areas of land, creating and restoring habitats so that plants and animals can adapt to climate change and move through our countryside and cities. In each country government policy and guidance should set a framework for planning decisions that create and safeguard landscapes that perform vital ecosystem services.

Developments such as housing estates that are well-sited and designed can enhance existing wildlife habitats and create a more joined-up landscape. The new town of Cambourne in Cambridgeshire, where developers 'designed in' the existing woods and watercourses, is now home to more wildlife than the farmland it was built upon. New development need not compromise ecosystem services. Certain agreements¹ can ensure developments incorporate natural features such as green roofs, public open spaces and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, known as 'SUDS'. This can help reconnect fragmented habitats and improve the permeability of our urban and rural landscapes for wildlife.

Planning can also protect, enhance and connect private and public open spaces. Private gardens are an important resource for people and wildlife in both rural and urban areas. They make up over 20% of London's land area for example. London Wildlife Trust has led a campaign for the re-categorisation of gardens from brownfield land (which is often relatively easy to secure planning permission to develop) to greenfield. The Mayor of London has

What do we propose?

In the face of climate change, the planning system has a critical role to play in mapping the way forward. If wildlife and people are to adapt to a changing climate it is vital that our planning system focuses on the value of the natural environment and the functions of our ecosystems:

- * **Embedding an ecosystem approach** The restoration of our damaged ecosystems and enhancement of the natural environment should be embedded in planning frameworks at all geographic levels. In Scotland there is an immediate opportunity for the Government to adopt an ecosystem approach in the new National Planning Framework II (see Fig 2).
- * **Long term thinking** Require National Policy Statements to consider climate change mitigation and adaptation when setting the policies for major infrastructure projects.
- * **Mapping out a future** Local planning authorities should incorporate habitat opportunity mapping into local development plans. This requires a strategic approach to planning which should incorporate protected sites as well as habitat creation and restoration. This approach is vital if planning decisions are to promote climate change adaptation.
- * **Incorporating green space** Multi-functional and wildlife-rich green space or green infrastructure should be part of the master-planning of every major development, just as transport or water infrastructure is.

pledged to protect private gardens from inappropriate development by strengthening the region's planning system.

Planning for climate change

Planning systems in the UK are increasingly taking account of climate change adaptation. For example, the Planning Bill will require local planning authorities in England and Wales to include policies on climate change mitigation and adaptation in their development plans. We now have planning guidance in England and Wales² for climate change³, and similar guidance is developing in Scotland⁴.

¹ Known as Section 106 agreements (England and Wales) and Section 75 orders in Scotland

² In Wales, this issue is captured as a central theme in the Welsh Assembly Government's Environment Strategy for Wales.

³ In England a new Planning Policy Statement (PPS): Planning and Climate Change was published in 2007, as a supplement to PPS 1 on Sustainable Development. The current Planning Bill also includes a duty to include policies on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

What are the barriers to planning delivering A Living Landscape?

- * **A fragmented landscape** Inappropriate development still remains one of the biggest threats to the UK's wildlife. According to the 2005 UK Biodiversity Action Plan report our habitats and species have become severely fragmented as a result of land use change, particularly as a result of built development and agriculture.
- * **Unsustainable development** Planning policy must secure truly sustainable development which brings together environmental, economic and social considerations, and not be diverted towards short-term economic gain. With the Government preparing the system for significant new infrastructure there is danger that this may happen. In England, responsibility for regional planning is to be taken from regional assemblies and given to the business-led Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) through the proposed Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill due in the Queen's Speech 2008-09. This is of significant concern with Natural England recently confirming the continued pressure that economic development is putting on the natural environment⁵. Similarly, there is growing pressure on wildlife from economic development in other parts of the UK.

⁴ In Scotland, Scottish Planning Policy 14 and the National Planning Framework II are currently being revised and consultation drafts currently include policies on moving towards an 'ecosystem approach' in planning and developing national and regional ecological networks

⁵ State of the Natural Environment Report, Natural England (2008)

Case studies



(photo: Jamie Grier)

Fig 1. Protecting urban greenspace –

London Wildlife Trust's Future Garden at the 2008 Hampton Court Flower Show. This garden explores how gardeners can adapt to our changing climate and maximise sustainability. London's gardens provide shade, absorb carbon, soak up floodwater, retain water and help to cool the city. They also provide vital habitat for wildlife. A network of wildlife and climate friendly gardens across the capital will enable species to move freely and adapt to climate change.



(photo: istock)

Fig 2. Embedding an ecosystem approach –

The Scottish Wildlife Trust is advocating the inclusion of a National Ecological Network in the National Planning Framework II for Scotland and the adoption of the ecosystem approach as an element of the new Scottish Planning Policy 14 (SPP14) on Natural Heritage. Encouragingly consultation drafts currently include policies on moving towards an 'ecosystem approach' in planning and developing national and regional ecological networks.