Trees & Open Spaces

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The workshop was attended by 15 members drawn from a range of public and voluntary bodies and individual members of the community.

Much of the discussion focussed on the role of trees, due to the particular interests of the group.

The point was made that Local Authorities have suffered a loss of resources, particularly skilled personnel and that this has meant that they are unable to give sufficient care to the maintenance and protection of trees or to support members of the public in doing so, even though the Community is often keen to help.

An example was given of Tree Warden schemes which were thought to be a good idea but tended to fail when L.A. tree officers were not available to support them.

The point was also made that many schemes to mobilise community support for tree or other environmental schemes suffer from 'short termism'. They flourish initially with funded support but often decline and fail when this is withdrawn, commonly after three years.

It was noted that there is a London Tree and Woodland Framework out for consultation at the moment and it was thought this could be a vehicle for establishing a policy for street tree management including how communities and local authorities can work together effectively.

It was felt it was as important to promote the maintenance and management of existing trees as to plant new ones and that tree planting campaigns should include the cost of maintaining the trees until well established.

It was felt important that as development takes place that where possible the structural planting should be put in place first rather than as an afterthought at the end. Some members were keen that the role of community tree nurseries should be promoted.

On Open Spaces generally, the concerns were also about the lack of revenue funding for maintenance, the need for long-term stability and secure funding streams, the threats to existing open spaces from development pressures and the need for effective community involvement. It was recognised that this works well in some boroughs and badly in others.

The point was also made that whilst there was a lot of interest in tree planting, it was important to keep a range of habitats and trees were not always a good idea.

There was a good deal of discussion about the various sources of capital funding such as lottery grants. It was felt that much more attention needs to be put into ensuring that the Management plans have addressed subsequent maintenance issues and there are costed plans in place before making grants available. It was also felt that S106 and other agreements should pay more attention to maintenance requirements.

Generally it was felt that there should be much more joined up thinking to ensure that resources were used wisely. Also that the economic benefits of biodiversity and a healthy environment should be properly evaluated and the information widely disseminated.

It was felt that more work was needed to ensure effective working across administrative boundaries (both between authorities with similar functions and others such as Health Authorities where there is scope for joint working through the liveability agenda. It was suggested that professional help should be employed to get these messages across, particularly when explaining proposals to members of the public e.g. the use of landscape architects to produce visual presentations of what schemes might look like.

A number of planning issues were discussed including S106, PPS9 and UDP's. It was felt there was not enough involvement or consultation with communities in these matters in an accessible manner.

Finally it was acknowledged that there is a lot of interest in trees and open spaces and a number of groups such as GreenSpace, London Parks and Green Spaces Forum, Greater London Authority, Geographical Information for Greater London etc who had a lot of information but there needed to be a way of letting people know it was there and how to access it.