

House of Lords Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment

Supplementary written evidence from the Landscape Institute

13 November 2015

Background

The Landscape Institute submitted written evidence to the Committee on the 6 October 2015, and was subsequently invited to give oral evidence on 29 October at which Noel Farrer, president of the Landscape Institute, appeared as a witness. This supplementary written evidence is designed to add further detail in response to questions asked by the Committee, particularly those questions which were not circulated in advance of the evidence session.

1. Q122 The Chairman: *Thank you for coming and giving up your time. I know it is quite a lump out of your day, but we try to motor fairly rapidly through it. You have had the questions, of course. I will take the first one. What role should green infrastructure have in the planning process? How can it be effectively prioritised? What policy changes are needed to facilitate this?*

1.1 Expanding on paragraph 4.2 of our written submission, which relates to the response given by Noel Farrer to Question 122 during the oral evidence session, we suggest that a new sub-national spatial planning framework for England should be developed that articulates corporate Government policy. That framework should be based on the National Character Map of England as published by Natural England. The framework would focus on the distinctive variations in the landscape and not on administrative boundaries. These spatial plans might cover more than one Character Area – an example of this is the draft Local Plan for the South Downs National Park which absorbs 11 local plans and covers two distinctive character areas. They would for the first time cover town and country by integrating economic, social and environmental imperatives. They could be administered by Joint Committees (including central government agencies) under the Local Government Act and approved by the Secretary of State. They would refocus all relevant levels of the public sector intervention on sustainable place-making to meet today's challenges and the needs of future generations. This new spatial planning framework would help good quality place-making and encourage multifunctional green infrastructure by:

- Providing a clear corporate government policy for new development and the management of town and country, mapped spatially;
- Setting out the baseline character of all places that are valued by the population as the starting point of any new development;
- Identifying the utilitarian aspects of urban spaces and land for public good;
- Providing clarity in government policy for regulators as they apply to specific places;
- Redirecting democratic intervention to concentrate on places rather than on administrations – either geographic or topic; and
- Establishing a programme of delivering sub-national spatial plans (priorities for the production of these new spatial plans based on need).

2. **Baroness Andrews:** *This is a really crude question, but in order for us to make that argument, can you quantify the benefits? Can you monetise them? Can you show that there are key developments in this country where people have bought houses that have been above the market rate because they want the green access, the green environment and all the things you are talking about?*
- 2.1 While this is an extremely complex matter, where it is difficult to isolate green infrastructure as the variable that made a difference in terms of commercial gains, some evidence is available. Firstly, the Committee should note the excellent report developed by Natural England, the Microeconomic Evidence for the Benefits of Investment in the Environment 2. This covers a huge range of economic benefits that can arise from green infrastructure investment. In particular section 3b explores the relationship between investment in the environment and house pricesⁱ.
- 2.2 The often-cited research undertaken by CABI Space, *Does Money Grow on Trees?*ⁱⁱ is also worth bringing to the attention of the Committee. It includes a number of case studies exploring the ways in which green infrastructure can lead to increased property values.
- 2.3 Furthermore, researchⁱⁱⁱ undertaken by Savills has shown that the features homeowners value most about their homes are not necessarily associated with the building itself, but more with the environment in which it is located. Factors such as neighbourhood safety, greenery and access to amenities are cited as more important than simply building attractive buildings. These must be created by focussing on the on the relationship between individual developments and the wider area or in other words, 'placemaking'.
- 2.4 In 2011, the Landscape Institute published a short collection of case studies to demonstrate the value of investing in landscape from a commercial perspective. *Why invest in landscape?*^{iv} features the new settlement of Cambourne, nine miles west of Cambridge on a site covering over 400 hectares. There are two aspects to this project which demonstrate the importance of landscape planning and design.
- 2.5 The first relates to the management of spoil from the site. From the outset, the landscape and open spaces were designed and phased to accommodate all spoil from the site. This required careful design to ensure that existing features were not buried or harmed and the resulting new landform looked natural. Upon completion, the project will have generated over 700,000m³ of spoil. Rates at the time of the publication of the document for disposal off-site were in the order of £28/m³. However, because of the careful landscape design at Cambourne, the cost of organising and administrating the on-site disposal was approximately £8/m³, resulting in a cost saving of about £20/m³ or £12million.
- 2.6 In addition to this, an explanation of the value of landscape from the Director for Cambourne, who was also the Major Projects Director for Taylor Wimpey, is featured in the publication:

“The real benefit to the community and added value that is reflected in a premium prices for good property in a nice environment is only realised when the masterplan is supported by first class landscape design and implementation. The combined effect of good initial planning, implementation and long term maintenance all adds to the reputation that Cambourne enjoys as a desirable place to live and this is reflected by consistent sales and ongoing delivery of homes with obvious benefits to major developers Taylor Wimpey and Bovis.”

2.7 There is wider evidence from other organisations too, such as The Mersey Forest which we expect will have been brought to the attention of the Committee already.

3. *The Chairman:* *Can I just ask a question? You have triggered something in my mind. What about having a trade association for landscaping or for place makers? Well-run trade associations, such as the civil engineers’ or the mechanical engineers’, have impact, which means a lot when dealing with Government. Engineering itself has something like 50 institutions, which is what they call them but they are actually trade associations. They probably would not like to be told that, but they get things done. Think of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. This is so important.*

3.1 The Landscape Institute was puzzled, and slightly concerned, by this question. The Chairman’s mention of *“well-run trade associations, such as the civil engineers’ or the mechanical engineers”* seems to be referring to the Institution for Civil Engineers (ICE) and the Institution for Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) because she then goes onto assert that *“...they are actually trade associations. They probably would not like to be told that...”* Both of these organisations are in fact professional bodies and registered charities and are governed by Royal Charter, as is the Landscape Institute. The line of questioning therefore indicates that the Chairman did not understand in advance of (or even become aware during) the oral evidence session that the Landscape Institute is in fact the Royal Chartered body for landscape architecture and the landscape architecture profession. It is not a trade body, nor are either of the aforementioned institutions.

3.2 Regardless, it is important to note that the Landscape Institute is significantly smaller in terms of membership numbers, 5,000, compared to ICE (80,000) and IMechE (111,000). Despite this, the Landscape Institute works hard, both alone and in partnership with a number of organisations, to help shape public policy, most recently on green infrastructure within the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) in collaboration with the TCPA, working with the Department for Communities and Local Government.

4. *Q127 Baroness Parminter:* *I was surprised in your evidence that you did not mention the work done by the Natural Capital Committee and its initiative to try to bring natural capital into the accounts of the nation and to have them in the Green Book by 2020. If that was achieved, to my mind that could be a very important way to encourage businesses to get green infrastructure and other natural capital on their business accounts...I wondered if you would share the view that that initiative is important. It was set up under the last*

Government. Should this Committee be ensuring that necessary financial resources and political support are retained for that initiative, which could have far reaching benefits?

- 4.1 Noel Farrer offered qualified support for the work of the Natural Capital Committee (NCC) and the idea that the concept of natural capital, if properly supported, could be useful for the green infrastructure. The NCC has achieved a great deal and should continue to receive political support. But it is disappointing (and short-sighted) that the Government, in its response^v to the Third Report from the NCC, does not agree with the NCC's recommendation that "*The National Infrastructure Plan should incorporate natural capital in to each of the main infrastructure sectors*". This recommendation, if adopted, would have been extremely valuable in properly integrating green infrastructure alongside traditional 'grey' infrastructure and breaking down the frequently cited, and in our opinion valid, concerns about the 'silo' approach to planning and development. In its response, Government does not even offer much in the way of an explanation as to why it disagrees with the recommendation.
- 4.2 We understand the Government, via Defra, is in the process of developing a 25 year Environment Plan. Again, it is not clear how this will relate to natural capital, nor the National Infrastructure Plan. These strategies provide an opportunity to overcome the 'silo' mentality that is undermining the need for a strategic and coherent approach to land use.
5. **Q129 Baroness Whitaker:** *Both of you commented in your evidence on a skills and expertise shortage in various areas. What are your ideas about how you would remedy this, including for local government?*
- 5.1 In addition to the response given by Noel Farrer, it would be useful for the Committee to be aware that there remains a high proportion of development in this country where neither the developer or the regulatory body / local planning authority has the right expertise to deliver high quality, multifunctional landscape and green infrastructure. Furthermore, local planning authorities, increasingly constrained financially, do not have the resources to adequately enforce landscape conditions. We would like to emphasise the point made in our written evidence submission that we would like to propose that a Head of Landscape Profession, located in the corporate centre of each local authority. Such a role would provide guidance and support the commissioning of private sector input in delivering landscape services and securing the wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits that are possible from adequate, intelligent approaches to landscape planning, design and management.

ⁱ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6692039286587392>

ⁱⁱ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118095356/http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/does-money-grow-on-trees.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.savills.co.uk/research_articles/186866/181237-0

^{iv} <http://www.landscapeinstitute.org/PDF/Contribute/WhyInvestFinalA4pages.pdf>

^v https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/462472/ncc-natural-capital-gov-response-2015.pdf