

Open Space Strategies: Best Practice Guidance

Joint Consultation by CABE Space and the Mayor of London
Response of the Landscape Institute, December 2008

Introduction

The Landscape Institute is the Chartered Institute in the UK for Landscape Architects, incorporating designers, managers and scientists, concerned with enhancing and conserving the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, representing members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies and in academic institutions and commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute welcomes the opportunity to submit its views as part of the joint consultation on Open Space Strategies (OSS), a Best Practice Guidance. In so doing, we wish to make a number of comments, some general and some specific.

General comments

It would be helpful to have a section that defines green infrastructure and explains the differences between green infrastructure strategies and open space/greenspace strategies as well as how and where they should overlap. Sometimes, in our members' experience, different departments in the same local authority may be responsible for green infrastructure strategies and open space strategies, especially where the former is taking a sub-regional approach that may involve a large number of adjacent authorities. The Landscape Institute considers it is important to give clarity on the roles and functions of both, and how they inform each other. This may be best demonstrated by a case study, but we feel it should also be explicit in the guidance text itself.

It may be worth noting here that the Landscape Institute will, early in 2009, be publishing a position statement on Green Infrastructure. This document will set out the value of a green infrastructure approach, the role of landscape architects in its delivery and will showcase just some of the work of the profession.

Linked to the comments above about green infrastructure, open space strategies need to explain the benefits of multi-functionality, but we recognise in establishing typologies for open spaces, a multi-functional approach may not be the best or easiest way forward. It may be that there are open space categories other than those suggested in the consultation draft. However, there is some logic in relating typologies to PPG17. However it is not clear if the updating of PPG 17 to PPS 17 will include a review of typologies which reflects more successfully the importance of multi-functionality. If this were the case, the Landscape Institute feels it would be inappropriate for the Open Space Strategy Best Practice Guidance to include out of date thinking on typologies.

We understand there are some very good case studies that will explore the relationship of an open space strategy with the Local Development Framework (LDF) process. It would be helpful to emphasise this in the text in addition to the case studies and to demonstrate it on a temporal scale basis. If politicians and officers outside the greenspace agenda can see easily how important a role an open space strategy can play in the LDF process, this adds weight to the reasons for undertaking an OSS in the first place.

The Landscape Institute welcomes the inclusion of case studies on how to deliver the action plans contained in the OSS as well as how to go about preparing a strategy. This section will be of benefit to local authorities that have completed strategies and also to those embarking on them. Therefore,

we wonder if the balance of strategy and implementation pages should be adjusted slightly, perhaps to include more on the implementation stages.

Some of our members outside London wonder how local authorities elsewhere will react to the guidance emanating, in part, from the Mayor of London. Inside the document it is clear that the vast majority of the guidance is applicable nationally and it is obvious where London-only comments are made. This is explained and CABE Space's role should provide comfort in this regard. We do however consider that thought needs to be given to the presentation of the guidance, in particular the front cover, to ensure any images are either obviously NOT London, or are "anywhere" images, and perhaps in terms of a foreword there should be contributions from more than just the London Mayor. Notwithstanding these comments, we do appreciate that the Greater London Authority has played a key role in the updating of the guidance and should rightly be referenced and acknowledged in this regard.

The Landscape Institute would like to see all references to housing growth also refer to housing market renewal. There are as many issues to do with open space function, aesthetics and management in areas of housing market renewal as in the growth areas. In particular in this respect, some of our members have been involved with CABE Space work on interim uses of land that is temporarily available and they feel that this type of space should be covered in the OSS guidance, so that it can be included where appropriate.

Specific comments

In the section relating to the reasons for producing a strategy (bullet points at the bottom of page 9), the Landscape Institute would like to see specific mention made of climate change and the need for adaptation and mitigation. (A copy of the Landscape Institute's Climate Change Position Paper is enclosed). We are aware that some OSSs take on board the climate change agenda fully, where as others do not refer to it all. We consider inclusion of reference to climate change in this section will widen the views of those who see OSSs merely as open space management plans. We do however acknowledge that NI188 - planning to adapt to climate change - is one of the national indicators listed as having relevance to OSSs.

On Page 10, Landscape Institute members would like to see the inclusion of highways as one of the departments that should be asked for input in the first paragraph under "Who prepares it?". Large tracts of open space are often in the management responsibility of highways departments and there is great benefit in dealing with the overall greenspace within a local authority in an holistic way – even if different departments then implement works and management.

Under essential tasks (Page 12), the Landscape Institute considers it would be helpful to add the following bullet:

- "Communicating the strategy's cross-cutting nature within the Council and the LSP"

Along a similar vein, it would be helpful to add to the section also on Page 12 that sets out the definitions and purpose:

- "how the strategy will link with other strategies"

This gives those responsible for the OSS, the means to engage with others producing other strategies and can also assist Members' understanding of how the different strategies inter-relate.

Page 16 lists those possible other relevant strategies to consider. This list is not exhaustive and the Landscape Institute feels it would be helpful to make that point. Other strategies that might need considering include the following:

- Cemeteries
- Public realm
- Site-specific development briefs
- Allotments

In preparing data sets on “supply”, it is important that open space that is truly accessible to the public is quantified as well as the overall amount of open space, much of which may be inaccessible. Large tracts of open space in the private sector that is not accessible, or e.g. playing fields (if not open to the community) can play some functions such as: aesthetic, ecological and flood management, but do not add up to part of the useable space for a local community or town.

Use of the word metropolitan could perhaps be replaced with urban?

Regarding National Indicators (Page 37), the Landscape Institute considers that Best Value General Survey indicator N14, “the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in the locality”, could also be added.

The Landscape Institute would like to thank the CABE Space and the Mayor of London for being given the opportunity to contribute to the Guidance. For any queries relating to this response, or for future consultations, please contact:

Stephen Russell, Policy and Public Affairs Officer
Tel: 020 7299 4509
Email: stephenr@landscapeinstitute.org

Produced for the Landscape Institute by Annie Coombs FLI.