

Statement: 10 January 2014

“End the paralysis on flooding and water” says President of Landscape Institute

The recent floods across the country have once again exposed the UK's lack of resilience when confronted by extreme wet weather. The existing sewer infrastructure can't cope, and the government appears paralysed when it comes to fully implementing the Flood and Water Management Act.

We have the means to better protect ourselves against flooding with the introduction of wetlands, reed beds, drainage channels and porous driveways (known as sustainable drainage systems: SuDS) - all accepted ways of helping to prevent run-off flooding. However, the UK's developers and housebuilders are arguing against this modest investment for new developments. We need to invest in order to save the massive costs to people and property demonstrated by the flooding across the UK. New development is just the tip of the iceberg. Unless we start a comprehensive programme of retro-fitting SuDS alongside larger scale catchment management programmes, the problems will continue to get worse.

“It's no surprise that parts of Britain are being devastated by floods again. The UK's water supply chain needs to become more sustainable, so it deals with drought and flood effectively. We need to look beyond the idea that a pipe in the ground is the best option for getting rid of rain water – this is an obsolete 19th-century solution to a growing 21st-century problem. Soft planted, green drainage schemes cost less whilst increasing property values and providing multiple benefits like increased biodiversity, better air and water quality, improved public health and enhanced land value. Elsewhere in the world investment in SuDS is accepted as an economical and sustainable way of protecting against the cost of flooding. We can look to Sweden, Australia, the US and Japan to find great examples of SuDS protecting homes and businesses from the devastation of flooding. Even countries like Latvia and Russia are building and retrofitting SuDS, whilst we continue to lag behind.

It is depressing to find the Government seemingly so short-sighted in its approach, considering first line economic growth in isolation of the longer term benefits to flood alleviation, urban pollution, and all other improvements to public amenity and biodiversity that SuDS can bring. Until the government takes it seriously and commits some money to addressing the problem, the floods will continue, and our homes, businesses and transport systems will be severely disrupted. The Natural Environment White Paper promotes the Green Economy; developing and implementing SuDS could make an important contribution to stimulating growth, and we know it can be extremely cost effective.”

Sue Illman, President, Landscape Institute

Sue Illman is available for interview by contacting Sarah Harrison on 07768 372892 or sarah@sarahharrionsnr.com or Paul Lincoln on 0795 8740513

The Landscape Institute is the royal chartered body for landscape architects. It campaigns to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for public benefit

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