Landscape Institute
People, place and nature

Maximising value from built development:
How a landscape-led approach delivers more for people, place and nature

Summary

The coming years will see the transformation of large areas of UK land and the creation of many new landscapes, through the building of homes – 1.5m in England alone – and new infrastructure. Approximately 73% of the land area of new housing developments is land that isn't built on[i]. Using this land well and getting the landscape right is the difference between mediocrity[ii] and the creation of healthy and thriving places to live.

We must create new places that deliver all aspects of what society needs – that generate healthy, resilient environments and communities - and that work for the long- term.

This briefing outlines how taking a landscape-led approach is essential to achieving this, and will make the most of this opportunity, for all those involved in the development process, including planners, landowners, developers, regulators, investors, communities and policy makers.

It sets out, with evidence and examples, the benefits a landscape-led approach delivers – in terms of value, people's health, community cohesion and wellbeing, nature restoration and climate resilience. It clearly defines what a landscape-led approach is and who must deliver it.

#LandscapeLed

Below: Barrow Island, Barrow in Furness, Farrer-Huxley

What does a landscape-led approach deliver?

The UK does not have sufficient land to meet all of society's needs in isolation[iii]. By taking a landscape-led approach to development, multiple objectives can be delivered efficiently from each development, maximising value.

Taking a landscape-led approach to built development delivers value through a wide range of benefits, such as:

Economic growth and placemaking

Well-designed landscape-integrated projects drive local economic growth, improve and sustain property values and increase levels of community satisfaction[iv].

Long-term value

Well-designed landscapes add significant value to housing[v]. The early consideration of landscape also streamlines development processes – by engaging communities early and effectively on co-creation principles, a landscape-led approach will help secure planning permission more quickly. When a landscape-led approach is planned and delivered it will reduce maintenance costs and avoid the need for future 'regeneration' spending.

Environmental

Investment in designing and creating green landscape areas and natural habitats is essential to create places that are hospitable now and in a changing climate. Incorporating existing and new environmental features delivers environmental benefits efficiently. For example, a landscape-led approach enables effective water management - through sustainable drainage systems – and enhances climate resilience[vi] - including the mitigation of extreme heat[vii]; while also restoring nature, meeting Biodiversity Net Gain requirements[viii], and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution[ix].

Community cohesion and crime reduction

Well-designed public and open spaces encourage social interaction and use, creating safe places and driving anti-social behaviour down. Evidence shows that the presence of trees and green spaces within landscapes also deters crime and anti-social behaviour[x] while also fostering community cohesion.

Wellbeing and health

There is overwhelming evidence of the links between health, both physical and mental, and the greenness of residential areas[xi xii]. Views of greenery[xiii] or even short amounts of time spent in nature[xiv] lead to significant health benefits. For children, exposure to green space improves not only health but cognitive outcomes[xv]. The integration of safe and inviting green spaces into developments attracts and maximises its use, delivering healthier lives, exercise, socialising and play. Together these outcomes increase health, significantly reducing the need for mental and physical health services and providing considerable, measurable societal benefits.

"Landscape architects, working alongside ecologists and planners, in both public and private sector are ideally placed to help meet the government's agenda, bringing vital expertise on the planning, design and management of land as a multi-functional resource."

Marian Spain, CEO, Natural England

Illustration: Claire Hunt CMLI, UBU Design

The landscape-led approach

What is a landscape-led development?

Placing landscape at the heart of the planning and development process creates enhanced value at a range of scales and in both rural and urban settings - from gardens and parks, to small housing developments, large new neighbourhoods and new towns; from transport, water and energy infrastructure, through to strategic planning and decisions about where development takes place within the wider landscape.

Landscape is critical infrastructure. The opportunity to create quality places for people and nature to thrive cannot be missed.

A landscape-led development meets the following criteria:

Landscape first:

Consideration of the development starts with engaging the skills of a landscape architect early in the process. Understanding and then realising the potential of the landscape is central to the success of a place, ensuring the new landscape meets the needs for the development (whether housing or other), for the new and existing communities and the needs of natural systems. Landscape architects understand the connections between bio-physical, heritage and cultural factors and infrastructure needs and utilise the qualities of the existing landscape to create sustainable and enduring new places.

Landscape as a system:

Multiple, interconnected factors - including heritage, biophysical factors (such as geology and soil), natural assets (including habitats and species), water management, food production, people's health, wellbeing, and community needs are considered together to deliver maximum benefits initially and long term.

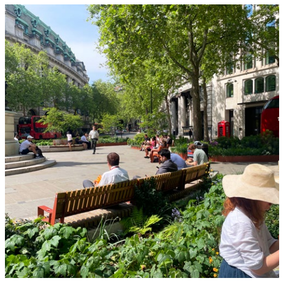
Landscape expertise throughout:

A chartered landscape professional is involved at every stage of the development process. The natural landscape and desired landscape should be considered throughout the planning, design, delivery and subsequent management of the development, with green-blue infrastructure integrated throughout.

Landscape legacy:

The development is future proofed minimising the need for regeneration funding. It has a management plan that creates provision for achievable longer-term management to deliver benefits over time and is designed to adapt and evolve in the years to come, responding to environmental and social change.

Below: Strand Aldwych, St Clement Danes, LDA Design



Who can deliver this?

Chartered landscape professionals (members of the Landscape Institute), play an essential role in shaping the environments in which we live, study, work and socialise, ensuring they are beautiful, functional and resilient.

They design, plan, deliver, develop and advise on maintaining thriving places for the enjoyment and benefit of people and nature. They work in complex situations, bringing together different elements and expertise to deliver successful plans and designs that integrate physical, natural and human systems. Using creativity and a deep understanding of bio-physical processes, they create beautiful, functional and future-proofed places.

Landscape Architecture is a chartered profession. Chartered Membership of the Landscape Institute (CMLI and FLI) - whose charitable objective is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public - is only awarded to those who reach the highest standards in landscape education and practice. It endorses the individual as the best in their field.

Chartered landscape architects can work at different scales and stages, including:

- **Strategic land planning** – determining how land is best used to deliver the range of society's needs.
- **Policy making** – advising on suitable policy phrasing at local, regional and governmental levels (from Local Plans to National Planning Policy) to enable good value landscape planning.
- **Site optioneering** – advising where developments are best placed within the wider landscape to make the most of existing assets.
- **Masterplanning** – the planning of a whole site - regardless of scale, to deliver sustainable, functional and beautiful places.
- **Detailed design of developments** – working with the natural, cultural and landscape qualities of the site to inform the location, layout and scale of the development and areas within it. Assessing and informing the scale of streetscapes, the design of planting and drainage systems, open spaces, doorstep play, walkable areas, and community development.
- **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment** – to inform decision making across all of the above.
- **Community engagement** – helping communities to visualise and co-create new landscapes.
- **Landscape and Ecological Management Plans (LEMP)** – comprehensive working site management plans with communities at their heart, which advise the landowner as much as any contractor or other caretaker how to look after the land well.

Conclusion: Designing for the future

A landscape-led approach sees the landscape not just as an aesthetic feature but as a fundamental framework that shapes sustainable, liveable and climate resilient places - delivering commercial, nature and community value in the short and long term. Involving chartered landscape professionals from the outset of the development process ensures this value and benefit.

Chartered landscape architects are accomplished at working at all scales and in complex environments, delivering solutions for places that succeed both now and in the future. They create resilient places where the landscape will protect people and enhance their lives and where people, in turn, cherish their communities, nature and their landscape.

"Well-designed, landscape-integrated regeneration projects can lead to 15-20% increases in property values and higher levels of community satisfaction."[iv]

Case Study:

Connswater Community Greenway
Belfast

Landscape Institute President's Award winner, 2019

The Greenway is a 9km linear park in one of the 10% most disadvantaged parts of Northern Ireland, delivered by landscape architects The Paul Hogarth Company and AECOM. New research shows the scheme has generated between £1.34 and £1.59 in local economic benefit for every £1 invested[xvi], demonstrating the strong return landscape-driven projects can offer.

Case study:

Trumpington Meadows
Cambridgeshire

Landscape Institute Excellence in Biodiversity Conservation and Enhancement Award winner, 2021

A landscape-led masterplan for 1,200 homes by landscape architects Tor&Co, Trumpington Meadows is located within a new waterside country park. The creation of such extensive green infrastructure helped to mitigate objection, while a collaborative approach to ongoing management with The Wildlife Trust has enabled a Biodiversity Net Gain of more than 46%,on top of enhanced community life and pride that has driven a 10% increase in housevalues[xvii].

Case Study:

Thamesmead
Greater London

Peabody's regeneration of Thamesmead in Southeast London is providing quality homes and amenities, supporting communities, and enhancing natural assets including 240ha of green space, five public parks, five lakes, 7km of river frontage and 53,000 trees. Their work includes a large-scale programme co-produced by paid local residents, projects to 'green the grey' around two large 1960s estates, and community participation in habitat creation, woodland coppicing and tree planting.

Case study:

Bradford Green Infrastructure Network
West Yorkshire

Landscape Institute President's Award winner, 2023

The role of landscape professionals within the public sector is vital. In Bradford, the Metropolitan Landscape Design and Conservation team has helped to address health inequalities in neighbourhoods within the 10% most deprived in England through a green infrastructure network of over 30 strategically linked projects. The city is setting a benchmark for landscape-led planning, connecting nature-positive growth with better access to green space for local communities.

Case study:

Mallard Pass Solar Farm
Rutland

Mallard Pass Solar Farm is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project that will generate enough clean energy to power 92,000 homes annually. Landscape planning by LDA Design includes more than eight kilometres of permissive paths, 150ha of new grass and woodland, 72% Biodiversity Net Gain and continued agricultural use: A shining example of making best use of the land as a multifunctional resource, while helping the UK reach net zero.

References

i Estimates suggest that at least 73% of the area of all housing developments, whether urban or sub-urban is not built on. Taking a landscape led approach to the development will ensure this land delivers multiple benefits.

ii A Housing Design Audit for England, Places Alliance, 2021

iii Multifunctional Landscapes, The Royal Society, 2023

iv Measuring the placemaking impacts of housing-led regeneration, Homes England, 2023

v The Economic Impact of Ornamental horticulture and landscaping in the UK, Oxford Economics, 2018

vi Landscape for 2030, Landscape Institute, 2021

vii Data from Arup's Uheat tool

viii See Mallard Farm case study

ix The benefits to people of trees outside woods, Rouquette, J.R. and Holt, A.R., The Woodland Trust, 2017.

X See ix

Xi The relationship between trees and human health, Donovan, G.H. et al., American Journal of Preventative Medicine 44, pp.139-45,2013

Xii Residential greenness and prevalence of major depressive disorders, Sarkar, C., Webster, C. & Gallacher, J.,The Lancet Planetary Health 2, e162-e173, 2018

Xiii Healing Gardens: Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations, Cooper Marcus, C. and Barnes, M., Wiley, 1999.

xiv. Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence, Jimenez, M. et al, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2021

xv Nature and Children's Health: a systematic review, Fyfe-Johnson A.L. et al., Pediatrics 148,2021

xvi The social return on investment of an urban regeneration project using real-world data: the Connswater Community Greenway, Belfast, UK, Tate, C. et al, Cities & Health, 2023

xvii Unpublished study by leading real estate services provider

About the LI:

The Landscape Institute (LI) represents the landscape profession, delivering its purpose under its Royal Charter for the benefit of people, place and nature, for today and for future generations. It is the professional home for over 5,600 landscape managers, landscape architects, landscape planners, urban designers, and landscape scientists, and many other landscape professionals working across urban and rural areas.

Visit our website for more case studies and model policies to deliver landscape-led development.

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