

A think piece in advance of the half day seminar:

'Delivering green infrastructure in economic growth areas – the key role of sub-regional partnerships' Wednesday 2nd of March, City Hall, London.



Sponsored by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and supported by the GLA.

Red alert for green infrastructure

**By Sue Morgan, chief executive officer,
Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust**

London is growing. The city's population is on course to hit 10 million by 2030, and although housing is still at deficit to what is needed, Opportunity Areas abound, regeneration schemes are proliferating and the cranes are in full flow, everywhere you look. But as the capital grows, it is crucial to put into place the right kind of pressure valves we need to keep the city living and breathing, and deliver the green infrastructure we all need. The question is, can sub-regional partnerships fulfil that need? Might they ensure we can all see the wood *and* the trees?

It is well documented how Green Infrastructure (GI) provides not just health and wellbeing to the city, but value too. Developers and homebuyers alike recognise that the amenity that is associated from planting new trees and keeping existing ones – as with Lendlease's experiences at Elephant Park in south London, for example – can lead to value. Sometimes this can add as much as 10% to a property price (according to research by Knight Frank and Santander), if it is near to green space or good public realm. It also provides essential cooling for the city, which is increasingly important with the onset of global urbanisation and warming. And yet, although London can lay claim to having some of the best green spaces in the world – it's well used parks, gardens and cycleways, for example – there is a disconnect between the love the public has for these assets and how they are, or can be, paid for and managed in the long run.



A think piece in advance of the half day seminar:

'Delivering green infrastructure in economic growth areas – the key role of sub-regional partnerships' Wednesday 2nd of March, City Hall, London.



Sponsored by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and supported by the GLA.

Such GI can help people's blood pressure, alleviate depression, and provide leisure space where people can walk, run or cycle, thereby easing the pressure on hospitals and waiting rooms. And it is this kind of holistic approach that was adopted by the GLA's green infrastructure task force in its *Natural Capital* report – that GI should figure more widely as a network in the next iteration of the London Plan, and that the next mayor should endorse some of its recommendations. *Natural Capital report* click [here](#)

So, what are non-statutory sub-regional partnerships, and how can they help? By way of a background to this question and view of how partnership working can succeed, the Lee Valley Regional Park is a good example. But Lee Valley is a statutory park authority and planning consultee with a 4,000 acre estate and development remit across sport, leisure and nature. It was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1966 as part of Abercrombie's vision, to become London's 'green lung', and is backed with a public levy from London, Essex and Hertfordshire – something that is unlikely to happen again. Partly this is because of funding in austerity Britain, but it is also because it can be seen as politically unpalatable – why should local London councils pay for a park relatively far away?

Because, says Lee Valley Regional Park Authority chief executive Shaun Dawson, London as a whole benefits from sub-regional as well as regional parks, through for instance the Authority's three internationally acclaimed London 2012 venues which are jam packed with community activity and major events and which deliver a tangible Olympic legacy every day. LVRP is itself the sum of regional partnerships delivering each chunk of its parkland through acquisition, having started with a blank, contaminated canvas all those years ago.



A think piece in advance of the half day seminar:

'Delivering green infrastructure in economic growth areas – the key role of sub-regional partnerships' Wednesday 2nd of March, City Hall, London.



Sponsored by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and supported by the GLA.

The Authority, which is providing assistance, expertise and guidance to the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust, is responding to the pressures on local authorities by reducing the levy year on year and continuing to raise more funds by other means.

So, in austerity, the idea of setting up another formal regional park authority is therefore a long shot. Much better to share resources and set up in partnership – statutory and non-statutory organisations avoiding duplication and pooling their resources and that inward and outward investment for a common purpose.

On my home patch in the Wandle Valley, the river knows no local authority boundaries, so we cannot hope to look at a strategic project like river restoration or SUDS alleviation for run-off waters going into the river, or working with housing developers on the margins on the river, without adopting a strategic perspective. And in order to do that you need to have a decent partnership set up in order to share and pool those resources. With 15 miles of clean chalk stream in London, isn't somewhere like the Wandle Valley worth protecting? Shouldn't we be better at shouting about what we have, and how this kind of necessary green infrastructure can be preserved and enhanced?

A good example of partnership in practice is the Cross River Partnership. The CRP is delivering very different services to a regional park, but nonetheless is a membership organisation comprising a number of local authorities and landowners, along with various voluntary, public and private sector organisations, all working together to improve the public realm and economic and regeneration training based projects.



A think piece in advance of the half day seminar:

'Delivering green infrastructure in economic growth areas – the key role of sub-regional partnerships' Wednesday 2nd of March, City Hall, London.



Sponsored by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and supported by the GLA.

So it is a similar emphasis; a non- statutory partnership, working in a sub-regional context, can ensure that items like Section 106s and CIL are pooled effectively. But LEPs could be another very effective way of funding green infrastructure. Perhaps we need a sea-change in thinking to allow such investment into GI and the public realm, as happens in Oxfordshire and elsewhere. Why the closed door here?

In London, the Colne Valley Regional Park is another good example, working with a combination of public, private and voluntary groups. The River Nene Regional Park – whose chief executive Kathryn Hardcastle is speaking at the upcoming event at City Hall on delivering green infrastructure in economic growth areas – is another case of a very successful non-statutory regional partnership with a similar composition, working powerfully to create sustainable outcomes.

The fiscal and social values of both come from working collectively with private and public, with the charity sector able to lever in external grant funding that is out of reach to local authorities, and to work with the private sector in different ways. This kind of set up allows one to be much more project 'savvy', in choosing projects and to develop a shared outcomes framework to maximise their benefits. And those benefits could range from economic return in terms of attracting more private investment or a social return – happier, healthier communities. It's a win-win.



A think piece in advance of the half day seminar:

'Delivering green infrastructure in economic growth areas – the key role of sub-regional partnerships' Wednesday 2nd of March, City Hall, London.



Sponsored by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and supported by the GLA.

So: if we don't all work together collaboratively then we will miss an opportunity to make London a resilient, greener city, with better new ways found to maintain the world-class green spaces we all enjoy. It is an essential mechanism that makes the city engine work better. Green infrastructure is the water in the radiator that keeps the city alive.

Ultimately, the key recommendation made in *Natural Capital*, that sub-regional partnerships be supported, is one we can or should all believe in. But we need some sort of central GI coordinating body to look at the issue in the round from a powerful, London-wide perspective, rather than continuing to treat something so essential in an *ad hoc* way. Maybe that is a job for the public realm task force recommended by the Mayor's Design Advisory Group in its Good Growth, 'Public London' report or a central GI commissioner recommended in *Natural Capital*.

Either way, it is time for green infrastructure to rise up the national political agenda and be recognised at the heart of the regeneration agenda. It is time for action, before it is too late.

** This think piece will be followed by a conference report following the event on 2nd March*



A think piece in advance of the half day seminar:

'Delivering green infrastructure in economic growth areas – the key role of sub-regional partnerships' Wednesday 2nd of March, City Hall, London.



Sponsored by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and supported by the GLA.

Wandle Valley Regional Park

We are working to create a new regional park in the Wandle Valley, stretching from Croydon and Sutton through Merton and Wandsworth to the Thames in the north. Our exceptional network of green spaces rich in history will help you to escape the pressures of city life, get closer to nature, and to be more active. The park will create a high-quality environment that will help bring jobs, growth and prosperity to the Wandle Valley.

The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust has been set up to:

Provide leadership, coordination, innovation and resources to enable the longer-term vision of a high quality, multi-functional and attractive Regional Park to be achieved

<http://wandlevalleypark.co.uk/>

info@wandlevalleypark.co.uk

The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority is responsible for the 10,000 acre Lee Valley Regional Park, a hugely popular regional sport, leisure and nature destination. <http://www.leevalleypark.org.uk/>

