



The UK Man and the Biosphere Committee Urban Forum

Minutes of the UK MAB Urban Forum meeting held 25 February 2004 at the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment, London.

Present

| | | |
|----------------------|-------|--|
| Ian Angus | (IA) | SNH |
| John Box | (JB) | Atkins Environment (Chair) |
| Peter Cush | (PC) | Environment & Heritage Service |
| Gerald Dawe | (GD) | Kingston University |
| Dave Dawson | (DD) | Strategy Directorate, Greater London Authority |
| Ian Douglas | (ID) | Manchester University |
| Mathew Frith | (MF) | Peabody Trust |
| Pete Frost | (PF) | CCW |
| David Goode | (DG) | Strategy Directorate, Greater London Authority |
| Chris Gordon | (CG) | East Midlands Region, Countryside Agency |
| John Handley | (JH) | Manchester University |
| Judith Hanna | (JHA) | English Nature (by invitation) |
| Carolyn Harrison | (CH) | University College London |
| David Knight | (DK) | English Nature |
| Graham Leeks | (GL) | CEH Wallingford |
| Grant Luscombe | (GL) | Landlife, National Wildflower Centre |
| David Nicholson-Lord | (DNL) | Independent Consultant |
| Jon Rouse | (JR) | CABE |
| Peter Shirley | (PS) | The West Midlands Wildlife Trusts |
| Alan Scott | (AS) | Independent Consultant |
| Julia Thrift | (JT) | CABE Space |
| Matt Fry | (MJF) | CEH Wallingford |

1. Apologies and Welcome

Apologies

Moira Anderson (MA)
 Peter Jarvis (PJ)
 Richard Sharland (RS)

JB welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Jon Rouse, Julia Thrift and CABE for hosting it. JB introduced the work of the Urban Forum. Members introduced themselves and their interests.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the December 2003 meeting were signed by JB as an accurate record

3. Presentation by CAFE & discussion of the role of urban green space in the work of CAFE and CAFE Space (Jon Rouse and Julia Thrift)

Jon Rouse summarised the work of CAFE, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, its development from the Royal Fine Art Commission and its role in all aspects of the built environment. CAFE is funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Culture Media and Sport. Information about CAFE can be found from their website:

www.cafe.org.uk/about/

They operate under six main programmes: Design Review, Project Enabling, Policy and Communications, Research, Regions, Education. In May 2002 an additional programme, CAFE Space, was set up to address the problems of parks and greenspaces. Julia Thrift described the work of CAFE Space. Supported by ODPM, CAFE comprises 10 staff as well as sharing resources with CAFE. In addition they have enlisted the help of numerous advisors. They operate along a 5 programmes:

- **Enabling** – helping local authorities to develop greenspace strategies and providing training to Local Authorities
- **Policy and Research** – Developing policy positions and producing literature on, for example, an international comparison of 10 cities and their approach to managing greenspace, and the economic and health benefits of good greenspace
- **Campaigning** – increasing public and professional awareness of the importance of good quality parks and public space through campaigns such as ‘Wasted Space’
- **Standards and Best Practice** – raising the quality of parks and greenspaces through schemes such as the Green Flag awards and publishing information on best practice in developing greenspace strategies and management plans
- **Skills Development** – helping to improve skills within professionals responsible for designing and maintaining greenspace

JT gave an in-depth discussion of CAFE Space’s work within all of these fields and highlighted the wide variety of groups that they have consulted.

More information on CAFE Space is available at www.cafespace.org.uk

Questions were fielded from members:

MF asked about CAFE’s position on green roofs? JR replied there was no position as such. Currently a potential to provide input into the ODPM group on Sustainable Buildings through John Hartman.

DNL asked if CAFE has a policy on what constitutes a greenspace? JR/ JT answered that because of being supported by ODPM they have an urban focus. At a recent event in Birmingham public input into the question ‘what is good public space’ was gathered and this has been used in creation of the manifesto. Currently particularly concerned with issue of safety vs. pleasant space

GD asked if they were concerned with wider issues such as the space given over to roads and land fills? JT answered that there was a particular concern about roads but more emphasis on providing quality greenspace within existing and future built environment rather than dictating e.g. transport policy.

DG asked whether professional bodies such as ILAM should have been taking this approach before now. JR stated that there was an issue of bodies deciding whether they represent their members or the public in encouraging good quality within their trade. CABE has many professional bodies represented on its steering group including IDA, Groundwork, ILAM, Landscape Institute.

GL asked how their work differed from that of Greenspace (who have ODPM as one of their core funders). JT said that Greenspace work more closely with community groups and that an analogy would be the relationship between English Nature and the Wildlife Trust.

CH asked how many urban ecologists CABE Space had on its books. JT answered that it had many within its advisors, including MF and DG and had Chris Baines on its steering committee. JR stated that there were not enough and they were hoping to bring more in at commission level. MF stated that ecologists had better representation than he had originally feared.

AS noted the lack of career structure within Parks agencies. JT noted that addressing this was one of CABE Space's priorities and were doing this through their Skills programme. JH added that there was a lack of skills in this area within higher education. JT mentioned that the results of the international comparison between cities highlighted a difference in approach with more formalised structures present in other countries.

PS asked about CABE's policy towards public participation. JT explained CABE Space's regional structure of staff in London with teams of advisors in regions, 18 centres throughout the country, advocates in each region, London with its GLA, Centres of Excellence (e.g RegenWM in West Midlands) delivering its skills programme.

There was a general discussion of the importance of moving away from the culture of litigation that limits design and how this must come from a change in the public perception of risk.

The forum expressed its interest in the work of CABE and CABE Space and in future collaboration and thanked JT and JR for their contributions.

4. UNESCO /MAB Concept Document on Urban Ecosystems (Ian Douglas).

ID described the concept document and its value in highlighting different perspectives.

DG welcomed the document as encouraging the issues of urban ecosystems in political thinking, which is particularly important with respect to predicted population growth.

JH noted that there was no mention of gardens or the factor of quality of life. ID said that this was represented in that, in developing countries, people are drawn to cities because they hoped to improve their quality of life.

JHA and DK introduced the Local Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard document. DK mentioned the EN strategy for Sustainable Urban Design / Construction /

Management / Transport and invited a response to Mark Bacon due to be reviewing this in April

Action 4.1 DK to forward contact details for Mark Bacon

The subject of the review of the European Urban Biodiversity Strategy was mentioned, and that the urban aspects were poor suggesting that Urban Biodiversity is low on the European agenda.

DD mentioned the London Development Agency (LDA)'s Design for Biodiversity document that is available on the LDA website

(www.lda.gov.uk/workofthelda/strategy/strategy/content/18_508.asp)

Pete Frost said that the Inter-agency group would like to make a response to this document and suggested that the UK MAB Urban Forum should perhaps make a separate response from their particular independent point-of-view.

Action 4.2 MJF to send around hard copies of LDA document

Action 4.3 Members to put together comments on LDA document

5. UK MAB Urban Wildlife Award for Excellence (CG)

At the last Urban Forum meeting (www.ukmaburbanforum.org.uk/meetings.htm) a decision was made to take a different approach to the award. A new emphasis for giving the award, that of a story describing the site or project, was decided upon and a new set of criteria were drafted.

JB has reviewed Severn Gorge Countryside Trust, IA is going to review Jupiter Project, both require finalised version of new criteria

PF reviewed two sites in Wales and described the benefits of the new criteria. Dingle was easier to assess, and the methodology was very useful particularly setting the site as 'of its time'. At Cwm Talwg the method also worked well. Documentation as well as PF's reviews were available.

PC described the Bog Meadows site and its history of community involvement and cross-community support. He found the assessment simple using the new criteria, and the emphasis on a story assisted the appraisal.

GL described three projects. The Kirkby / Northwood estate encouraged a community to develop areas of cornfield annuals. Participation was high. Post project surveys found that many people used the area more often as a result. More work has been planned in the area. The project encouraged participation and hope in the local community as well as images in the Tate Modern helping to change perceptions of the housing estate. The second project, at Stockton, created perennial meadows and involved success in encouraging rare species and training professionals. The resulting site was very low maintenance and may become an LNR in future. The third project was Landlife's Wildflowers Work magazine is used widely as a basis for creative conservation policies.

There was general agreement that the new criteria were a good development and these were approved.

DNL suggested that there could be a series of questions to bring out the story, asking what the biggest obstacle was in creating the project, what the biggest asset of the project is, what's new about the project and what makes it different from other projects. This was agreed and the criteria are to be updated.

Action 5.1 CG to update award criteria with suggested questions

The awards for 4 of the sites (Dingle, Cwm Talwg, Bog Meadows, Northwood) were accepted on condition of completion of finalised application forms.

The other two projects (Stockton and Wildflowers Work) were to be reviewed by ID ASAP and the award agreed by email circulation prior to the next meeting.

Action 5.2 ID to review 3 Landlife projects, with Wildflowers Work review completed by March

PF showed a plaque that could be used to acknowledge the awards. PF and JB suggested further development of the website to allow the award to have a higher profile.

Action 5.3 MJF to collate all available information on award sites for next meeting and consider work required to produce Awards page.

6. Urban Greenspace and Mental Health (ID)

ID summarised his paper on the effects of greenspace on mental health. There are too few papers on the science behind the common assumptions that greenspace is good for mental health. A few more data sources have come to light including one from the Forestry commission, meaning that the paper needs a final update before any publication.

There was a general consensus that this was a very important and timely review of this area.

JH mentioned an English Nature report (ENRP533) on 'Nature and Physical Wellbeing' (www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/533.pdf)

DK mentioned that the ODPM would welcome some hard science in this area for their next spending round meeting.

PF mentioned that he would like to include some items from the paper within the Welsh Natural Greenspace guidance CD.

Action 6.1 PF to follow up ID for input into Welsh Natural Greenspace guidance CD.

PS suggested that we should interact with CABE Space over this issue.

Action 6.2. Members to get comments on Greenspace and Mental Health document to ID by 20 March

Action 6.3. ID to finish Greenspace and Mental Health document by 20 April

Action 6.4. MJF to email all members separately about comments on Greenspace and Mental Health document

7. Urban Biosphere Reserves (PF)

PF introduced his short report on Biosphere Reserves written to provide some input on this issue for the MAB Urban Group. Mention was made of the MAB urban website (www.unesco.org/mab/urban/urbanhome.htm) and the discussions within the forum area and of discussions of Biosphere Reserves having separate core areas for, say, culture and biodiversity.

DG stated that since the introduction of the idea of Biosphere Reserves the idea of core areas had not been respected and that there was a whole spectrum of city habitats, at one end of which were Biosphere Reserves.

PF stated that BRs were 90% process and 10% place but that the 10% had to be a very particular or special place to make it a BR. In addition BR's have to be managed to encourage access. Some examples were given including Rome, concentrating on the cultural aspects, Cape Town similarly though this has a particular ecological area already protected nearby, Durban, who have applied for the status of BR on the basis of the existing ecological network there.

DNL expressed a hope that a list of BRs would not simply replicate the quality of life league tables.

Some potential sites for BRs in the UK were mentioned, including the Mersey Basin, the lower Severn area. GL mentioned Liverpool, with a RAMSAR area, city of culture status, etc., being separately managed.

DG mentioned Portland Oregon, where disparate areas of greenspace are managed in their entirety in a functional way that protects them by policy, and that a BR shouldn't have to be a 'Cape Town' with v. excellent natural greenspace.

PF stated that by early summer we would need to make a response as there would be a conference in Rome in the autumn and Durban would soon be submitting its application.

Action 7.1. PF / MJF to coordinate response document on Biosphere Reserves and criteria

8. Social and Community Criteria for Selection of Local Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (PF).

PF mentioned these criteria and that DEFRA are planning to adopt them while the other regions are not. As at the previous meeting a 'yellow book' publication was recommended to help to guide the uptake of some central principles.

Action 8.1 members to email ideas about Social and Community Criteria document to PF

Action 8.2 PF to find experts for particular aspects of Social and Community Criteria publication and produce draft by next meeting

9. Urban Habitat Classification (PF)

PF stated that CCW had money this year to produce something on this but that other agencies would probably not be synchronised with this. PF welcomed the participation of other organisations, particularly the Inter Agency Urban Habitat group and NERC / CEH.

DD stated that similar work had been done before, both by CEH and the GLA/LDA.

AS stated that the London system was easy to use and appropriate.

JH stated that CABE had inherited a typology for urban greenspace and that the work from these other projects should be knitted together to feed through to CABE to influence this.

DD stated that a previous typology had only one open space type with a single usage classification rather than multiple usages being allowed.

This was considered to be an ideal project for the Urban Forum to work on and PF proposed to coordinate this.

Action 9.1 PF to coordinate Urban Habitat Classification work with Inter agency group and CEH and LDA

10. Review of Work Programme for 2003/2004, consideration of annual report for 2003/2004 and consideration of work programme for 2004/2005 (JB).

JB proposed that this work should be coordinated outside the meeting.

Action 10.1 MJF to finalise work programme progress / results for 2003/2004 by end of March

Action 10.2 MJF to seek proposals for work programme by end of March

Action 10.3 MJF to coordinate collation of final report by mid-April for finalisation at end of April

11. Matters Arising from December 2003 minutes

It was decided that the Secretary would check on Action List from December minutes and that any outstanding matters arising could be brought up by email.

12. Any Other Business

DK added note that Urban Forum members should coordinate any interaction with CABE through himself and / or MF in order to make sure there was a common position and that DK and MF were 'on message'.

DK brought up English Nature document EP 567 'Nature for People'. Available from website:

Summary: www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/567execsumm.pdf

Report: www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/567.pdf

CG mentioned that we should encourage CABE members at future Urban Forum meetings.

Action 12.1 MF to develop linkage between Urban Forum and CABE / CABE Space

GJLL mentioned the consultation document on the rural urban fringe by Groundwork called 'Unlocking the Potential' Details available at the Groundwork website. (www.groundwork.org.uk/policy/rufconsultation). Comments requested.

GJLL also mentioned the output of the URGENT programme, in particular the 'map' of outputs available on the website. (urgent.nerc.ac.uk/search_home.htm)

ID mentioned his draft document on Urban Pests was at a completed draft stage and requested comments.

Action 12.2 ID to provide electronic copy of draft Urban Pests document

13. Dates of Next Meetings

25 May 2004 - Scotland or NI (location tbc)

15 September 2004 - Birmingham (location tbc)

7 December 2004 - NI or Scotland (location tbc)

Summary of actions

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Outstanding Actions

| Review of Outstanding Actions from December 2003 meeting: | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Incomplete: | |
| Action 6.7: MJF to quantify website hit-rate / ranking for next meeting | Action point remains open. |
| Action 6.9: MJF to find out progress on any SNH work | Action point remains open. |
| Action 11.1: PC to circulate note from Inter-Agency Urban Habitat Network on impacts of Haskins report | Action point remains open. |