

Innovation in Green Infrastructure

The Melting Pot, Edinburgh

Why hold this event?

Innovation is one of the core characteristics of projects that we want to fund, but the feedback we got during Round 1 suggested it was more difficult to present convincingly than the more tangible project objectives.

That is hardly surprising. To have a completely original idea in the age of the Worldwide Web is really quite a feat. This event aimed to show that innovation *is* accessible and necessary. The Green Infrastructure Fund's working definition allows for an idea from one place being used, and likely adapted, to a new situation in Scotland – we recognise that innovation is not a 'one size fits all' concept.



The presentations gave a flavour and context for the need for green infrastructure innovation, and showed that innovation is not as difficult as we may suppose.

The workshop in the afternoon shook things up a bit, taking us out of our normal personas to look at situations in a new way.

Did the day work as an event? Feedback afterwards suggests it did, and during the day there was a great deal of very engaged discussion. The final proof will be in the applications we receive for Round 2, and future green infrastructure work that we may develop.

Setting the Scene

Motivation is the mainspring to innovation, so the event started with presentations demonstrating the very real need for green infrastructure.



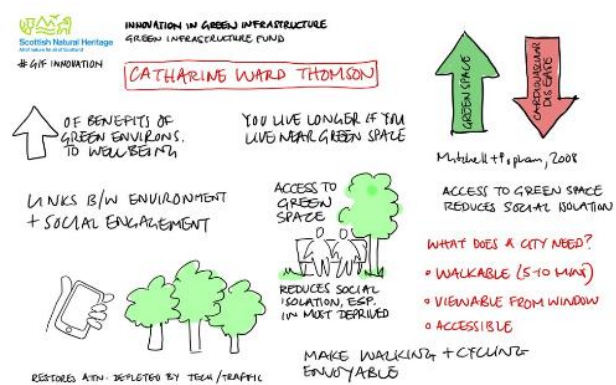
Catharine Ward Thompson - Professor of Landscape Architecture -University of Edinburgh

Salutogenic environments: supporting wellbeing in deprived communities

“By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” UN Sustainable Development Goal 11.7.

Why? Because our societies are developing an older and more urban profile, and the physical and mental health of our populations is declining. There is increasing evidence of how our good quality environments affect our health and wellbeing.

How? Professor Ward Thomson admitted that we do not fully understand how, but access to green and natural environments does reduce health inequalities. Walking in a park rather than a busy street has more of a positive effect on cardiovascular health and the beneficial effect is greatest on people from the most deprived groups in society.



The positive impacts result from physical activity, better social engagement, our inbuilt psychological and physiological response to natural environments. Greenspace is also associated with feelings of better social support.

What? It seems we need greenery that is

- nearby and visible from most places,
- at a range of scale from the small and private to large and accessible,
- and a travel network of greenspace.



Zarina Ahmad and Kristina Nitsolova – Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations

Planning for Equality WHY?

Ethnic minority groups tend to be concentrated in Scotland’s urban area, but their voluntary organisations tend not to apply for funding compared to other organisations. Having a well thought through Equality Impact Assessment may not only be a legal requirement for a project, but could also take your project to a far wider audience leading to more wide-ranging and valuable impacts.

INCH

Socially Responsive
Architecture + Design

Alasdair Clements – INCH Architecture – Drumlanrig

Innovation does not always have to involve new greenspace - with good engagement it is possible to retrofit. Alasdair Clements presented a real case of transforming a fairly uninspiring sheltered housing into a place that created outdoor space for living for everyone.

The problems to be addressed were: ad-hoc ramp construction, drainage, ponding on paths (ice during winter), no useable garden space, bin storage. The problems caused were longer stays in hospital, progressive decline of the development, loss of independence for the residents and a reduction in demand because of the poor aesthetic.

The solution was to treat the whole development as one space. The green infrastructure solution addressed all of the site and resident issues, and only cost £7,500 per household, but also reduced maintenance.

Marion Perez – Urban Pioneers



Teenage Kicks (Urban Pioneers)

Teenagers are notoriously difficult to 'reach' as part of community planning. Marion Perez presented projects from Scotland at Calley Muir, an ancient woodland site surrounded by new housing development.

The woodland was suffering urban fringe problems that many will be familiar with. By tapping into the mythical properties of animals and trees the woodland was transformed from a place with problems into a place where problems were solved.

Marion also was involved in running projects in mainland Europe that involved free breakfasts, tiny flags, recycled timber in arts projects that brought people together to discuss, and do something positive about their local urban greenspace issues. Consistently, the result was tremendous 'ownership' and more involvement from a wider group of people. The main message was that by involving teenagers in creating parts of the new design for e.g. hanging out area or play space within a park, they can create their own space where they like to socialise. This will give them ownership and they will be more likely to look after it.

Neil MacLean – Scottish Green Infrastructure Forum



10,000 rain gardens

10,000 rain gardens sounds difficult to do, but once again we found that innovation can be practical. Neil showed that by breaking an inspiration down into its individual parts we can move forward and deliver change.

What is a raingarden? A rain garden is simply a vegetated area

designed to receive rainwater and can be as small as a planter above ground, or as big as, or bigger than an urban park.

Why 10,000? It's a worthwhile and achievable target, but requires some effort and coordination. There is a suggestion that just over 750 rain gardens in the centre of Glasgow would resolve the surface water flooding expected with climate change. A large enough project means that new projects can learn from previous projects and their success, and there is the option to break the target down into smaller steps, '2020 by 2020' for example.

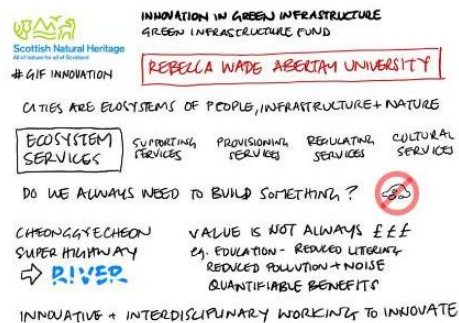


Rebecca Wade – Urban Water Technology Centre, Abertay University

Investing in Ecosystem Services

Rebecca spoke convincingly about the need to change the way we think about where we live. Cities can make or break the natural environment. We need to embrace Nature in a positive way for there to be hope for the environment outside our cities. And integrating nature into our cities is good for liveability, resilience, sustainability and human life generally.

To do that we need to accept that the four services that ecosystems provide are as relevant in cities, and across city boundaries as they are in the countryside. Rebecca spoke about inspiring examples from around the World including reinvigorating the Cheonggyecheon River through the middle of Seoul.



Scottish Natural Heritage Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

Arthur Keller / Fiona Stirling

Green Infrastructure Design for Multiple Benefits

The key to making good green infrastructure ideas into great projects is to think about how a single space can provide multiple benefits. Parks and even 'pocket parks' can go beyond being recreational space into being a flooding buffer during peak rainfall, reducing the risk to housing.

The most striking example was the restructuring of a 7m wide of a sea wall into a new saltmarsh terrace that became one of the SE of England's most important sea bass nurseries!



3-dot voting

We were then asked to suggest project ideas – and we had a lot of them. Hazel and Lindsey helped us to choose between them using dotted voting - an easy way to allow everyone to have an influence even if they are not the type of person that wants to be at the front.

All of our ideas were posted up on the wall. We each had three sticky dots. We could give one idea a surge by putting all three dots on one idea, or spread them a dot on each idea we like, but that always meant something gets left out. The technique was fast and simple. It showed which idea was the most popular.

Rip and Mix

We generated ideas on how to meet the needs with the most votes by Ripping and Mixing outlandish combinations of our projects' needs with concepts on pre-prepared cards like finding a new way to sell ice cream. The resulting ideas didn't really need to be the answer, but they often triggered other ideas and a lot of very stimulating discussion.



Summing up

We don't know at the time of writing if the event itself encouraged more innovation in Round 2 of the Green Infrastructure Fund because we are still assessing the applications. However, like most innovation, the event is already leading to other ideas and connections that were not considered beforehand, and we hope it will be equally useful for the Community Engagement Fund that we hope to launch early in 2017.

We also think the presentations and the workshop ideas presented above are enough in themselves to stimulate innovation even if you weren't at the workshop. But only what you do in the future can prove that right or not.