Sustainable Urban Planning
Networks for Green Spaces
increasing community involvement in urban biodiversity
Sustainable Urban Planning Networks for Green Spaces

The SUN Project ran from 2003 - 2006, and aimed to involve and engage local people throughout London and Rome in Urban Biodiversity. This created and supported environmental working groups through the production of Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs), which can be seen as a strategy document outlining local plans for wildlife conservation and enhancement.

The project aimed to develop and seek innovative ways of undertaking community consultation, delivering biodiversity strategies, stakeholder identification and engagement, and practical biodiversity improvement work.

Aims

- Extensive consultation for production of BAPs
- Production or revitalisation of BAPs for each partner
- Engagement of local stakeholders in BAP working groups
- Implementation of BAPs through innovative biodiversity projects
- Engagement of local community in BAP Implementation
- Delivery of final conference to share project findings
Outputs

- Production of 4 new Biodiversity Action Plans and 2 revitalised existing Biodiversity Action Plans through extensive consultation
- Successful stakeholder engagement through consultation & workshops throughout all partners organisations and boroughs
- BAP working groups set up and revitalised with local stakeholders
- Over 100 innovative green space improvement projects carried out to improve urban biodiversity.
- Improved the biodiversity value of over 70 urban greenspace areas through practical conservation work from local stakeholders
- Reports on good practice stakeholder participation in urban green space management
- Website documenting project activities and reports
- Final conference held in London, drawing together best practice urban biodiversity across Europe
Who's Involved

The project was a partnership between 7 organisations:

- London Borough of Sutton - Lead Beneficiary
- London Borough of Bromley
- London Borough of Redbridge
- London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
- London Borough of Hounslow/CIP
- Global to Local - a leading sustainable development consultancy
- Legambiente - an Italian environmental organisation working on behalf of Comune di Roma - City of Rome.

The project work was carried out across London and Rome, and involved close partnership working with regular exchange of ideas and best practice examples, to allow innovation to be carried out across the whole project. Lessons were learned through cross partnership working and the project benefited from this.
The Issues

Green space is an integral and vital element of the urban environment. Many urban areas contain sites of significant nature conservation value such as wetlands and ancient woodlands, which can often be of regional or national importance. However urban sites are more often characterised by fragmented sites, which only have local community importance such as gardens, allotments, churchyards and school grounds. The remaining biodiversity in these urban areas can be found in small remnant pockets of habitat that have intense development pressure on them due to their urban nature.

Urban Local Authorities have an important part to play by effectively involving stakeholders in the management of such sites, and ensure that biodiversity issues are integrated into urban development. There is also a need to effectively increase local community awareness about key environmental issues, so that the public can become more involved, engaged, and aware of the biodiversity benefits to conserve the scarce urban green space that remains in their local communities.
The Solutions

The aims of the SUN Project address the problems of conserving urban biodiversity. Throughout the project the partners tested innovative methods to encourage stakeholder engagement. They found that effective stakeholder engagement in the planning and management of urban green spaces was extremely positive for the following reasons:

- Reduces management costs as stakeholders take on responsibilities
- Stakeholder groups can be consulted for other projects and so keep down costs on development of further projects
- Ownership of local green space by local communities can result in less vandalism and damage to such spaces
- Stakeholders can assist in effective monitoring of the Biodiversity Action Plan process
- Stakeholders can bring in many specialist skills that can be drawn upon for implementation such as biodiversity survey and identification skills
- Local community groups that develop green spaces can have added power against local planning pressures.
- Local businesses can have great influence on local communities through getting them involved in local projects.
Biodiversity Action Plans

The Rio Convention in 1992 was held to help halt the loss of many important conservation species - here the term 'Biodiversity' was popularised and 150 countries signed up to develop national strategies to preserve key habitats and species.

Biodiversity means 'the variety of life', it encompasses the myriad of species of plants and animals and the range of habitats where they live and interact.

These national strategies fed down to local plans produced in the UK and other countries to look at conservation on a local level. Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) are evolving strategies & delivery mechanisms for conservation of priority habitats and species. They prioritise actions for protecting, conserving and enhancing those species and habitats within areas of importance and value on a local/regional/national scale.
Biodiversity Action Plans

- They identify priority species & habitats for local action
- Set measurable targets for conservation
- Provides a working partnership document
- Provides awareness raising for local action

The SUN Project enabled the production of Biodiversity Action Plans for Sutton, Richmond and Redbridge, and the production of a biodiversity strategy, and lists of key habitats and species for conservation by Legambiente on behalf of the City of Rome. Those partners with existing BAP documents, Hounslow/CIP and Bromley, were able to carry out large-scale thorough reviews as a result of their consultations on their existing BAPs.
Consultation

Extensive consultation was needed to achieve the outputs of BAPs as working documents with full stakeholder engagement and support.

The first stages of consultation involved each partner identifying the local residents and stakeholders views and ideas for priority conservation issues. This was done in many ways to grab public attention and to maintain the involvement of existing stakeholders.

Many Partners sent out initial questionnaires in varying formats to gain the public views. Eye-catching questionnaires on websites, in magazines and at local road shows provided vital information to begin the production/revitalisation of the BAPs.

The Partners targeted all residents, making special efforts to reach out to groups that had not been targeted or consulted with before. As a project over 7000 individuals contributed to the consultation process - these included the following:
Consultation

- Disability Groups
- Faith Organisations
- Local Council employees
- Refugee groups
- Race Equality Councils
- 'Friends of' Groups
- Youth Parliaments
- Schools and Colleges
- Ecological Professionals
- Amateur Naturalists
- Volunteer Groups
- Local Residents
- Allotment Societies
- Environmental Organisations
- Photography Groups
- Local Artists
- Local Businesses
- Land Owners
- Children & Family groups
- Police
- Sports Clubs
Once full consultation had taken place, stakeholder engagement was key to retain the many various groups that had been involved in the consultation stage.

Workshops and training events followed to maintain the stakeholders in the project and to continue to reach diverse ages, backgrounds, and new audiences. Getting people involved through education and awareness raising was important to retain the level of initial participation.

Some of the ways in which groups were involved and engaged:

- Posters & leaflets
- Workshops and training events
- Conferences & open days
- Practical conservation task days
- Individual meeting with local groups
- Press releases in newspapers and local radio
Stakeholder Engagement

Once groups had been established, and the BAPs written, it was important to retain this engagement so that successful implementation of all the BAP projects could take place.

Most partners found that they needed to supply a staff member to the stakeholder groups to act as a face to face liaison. This was crucial in retaining their involvement. Developing the projects around the interests and abilities of each group was another important tool. Groups that stayed involved in the BAP Process had tailored individual attention and partners found that taking the projects to the groups rather than bringing the groups to the projects worked best and delivered the best results.
Best Practice Projects

Redbridge Cardboard Garden Project

The aim of the cardboard garden project was to enhance school grounds for wildlife. Cleveland School in Redbridge, was chosen to pilot the project as it had a tarmac playground, no grassed area and was located in a built-up, socially deprived area. The challenge was to design and construct a sustainable garden using only recycled, biodegradable materials.

Planters were built using cardboard inner tubes from rolls of carpet and coffee sacks from a local Fair Trade coffee supplier. The construction was simple; the cardboard tubes were cut to size and fitted tightly inside the coffee sacks, pea shingle was poured into the tubes, then topped up with compost from a nearby community gardens. These structures were solid enough to stand alone and were then planted up with various salad, vegetables and edible flowers. The children had sole responsibility for these planters and when their crop was ready for harvest - they decided to host a harvest meal for their teachers, Fair Trade staff and the volunteers.

The designs on the coffee sacks prompted much discussion about the origins of the coffee beans and the school children decided to link up with a school in one of the coffee-growing countries and
**Best Practice Projects**

send them letters and pictures, showing where the coffee sacks ended up.

This project was a big success and enjoyed by all. It was an innovative concept that enhanced the school grounds for wildlife, and engaged a socially deprived community where a high proportion of pupils speak English as a second language. It provided the beginnings of possible habitats and biodiversity in a previously sterile environment.

**Bromley**

**Greening the Beck Corridor**

One of the projects undertaken in the London Borough of Bromley was 'The Beck Corridor'. This involved enhancing the green space landscape around The Beck river tributary running through the urbanised area of Beckenham and West Wickham. The aim of the project was also to raise awareness of the range of wildlife found in the area and to promote its enjoyment through walking and the use of sustainable transport. Schools, community groups, local residents and Friends groups have been involved in: creating stag beetle loggeries; planting wildflowers and native trees in road verges and grounds; erecting bat, bird and bee boxes in the area and planting butterfly-friendly plants in gardens.
Best Practice Projects

Wooden support stakes for roadside trees, stag beetles plaques and interpretation boards along the corridor highlight the network of green spaces and where to find out more information about local biodiversity. A pack of walk activities encouraging children to observe wildlife on their way to and from school has been created. An education pack, which uses information about the Beck Corridor as a case study is in production. A pack promoting short walks in the Beck Corridor, and designed for children and adults, highlights wildlife interest and encourages healthy walking.

Hounslow/CIP
Wild @ Art

This project involved a total of 80 people from various organisations from across Hounslow Borough including Age Concern, the Cathja Project (for adults recovering from mental health problems) and the Hanworth Youth Centre, none of whom had previously been involved in local biodiversity planning or implementation projects. Each group worked alongside a professional artist to produce art inspired by the natural environment, plants and animals. Each group worked for 6 weeks during the spring of 2006, and the project successfully provided the participants with an
Best Practice Projects

opportunity to learn new creative skills, engage in team-based activities, and to have fun whilst learning about local and wider biodiversity issues.
The project culminated in a public exhibition of the artwork held at Redlees Studios in Isleworth in May 2006.

Sutton Water Vole Project

The River Wandle, which flows through Sutton, used to have watervoles present, however due to loss of habitat, pollution and predation this species disappeared. This project aimed to restore suitable habitats along the river and to re-release water voles back into the river. The main workforce for the extensive preparation of the areas for release, were Sutton Youth Parliament and Envision - a group of teenagers who were interested in becoming involved in community and volunteer work. The project also engaged a local primary school to help with some of the practical tasks.
The main areas for release were first prepared by reshaping the riverbanks so that suitable burrows could be formed by the watervoles and easy access to the river could be achieved by removing toe-boards. The volunteers set to work preparing riverbanks for watervoles
Best Practice Projects

by planting up food for the voles and checking the riverbanks for their main predator the mink. The volunteers were given training on handling and surveying water voles and mink and managed to create suitable habitats for release of the water voles in Sutton. Not only were the groups trained in practical skills, which they can continue to use for other projects, they passed on the message about water vole decline as a result of the project at various events and conferences during presentations and workshops.

The water vole is one of the flagship species for Rivers and Wetlands in Sutton's Biodiversity Action Plan and is also a London Biodiversity Action Plan priority species.
"On boats to discover the Tiber: environmental education, history and culture of Rome's river" (In battello alla scoperta del Tevere: educazione ambientale, storia e cultura sul fiume di Roma), was developed with the City Council and the Department of Educational and School Policies of the Comune di Roma. Primary and secondary schools were involved in educational activities on the Tiber to increase awareness of biodiversity and the natural and cultural value of the river. This was done to increase awareness, as the River Tiber is often seen to locals as an unsafe, unclean area rather than a valuable habitat that hosts a huge range of biodiversity.

Boat journeys had up to 100 participants on board for each journey. From October 2005 to May 2006, 14 schools with a total of 470 students took part.

The schools of Rome that were not already involved in activities run by the Rome Environmental Education Network, were targeted. There were a large number of participants. The schoolteachers were prepared with 2 preliminary boat trips. During these journeys informative materials were distributed on biodiversity and environmental activities on the river. Taking into account the different ages of the participants, relevant educational materials were produced. Brochures for the classes were distributed with information on the history of the
**Best Practice Projects**

Tiber, flora and fauna, river ecosystem and risks from pollution. On the boats, mobile laboratories were set up so that the quality of the river water could be tested and to carry out other experiments. During the journey students were given tasks to help with the lab work and the collection of data, to develop their awareness of the surrounding environment. All groups that participated on the boat trips received info and work packs so that it could be followed up back at school.

**Richmond**

**Don't Rubbish our Sculpture**

This innovative project involved working with EcoAction (the recycling section of Richmond Council), a local artist and school children at Hampton Wick Infant School to create a biodiversity sculpture that was made entirely out of recycled materials. The sculpture was designed to include most of the habitats and species within Richmond's Biodiversity Action Plan in order to raise awareness about their decline and their local importance in the borough, as the materials used included batteries, waste bins, bike helmets, sun glasses, wheel ties, plastic spoons and an assortment of different materials to make the different species. The work at the school included educating children about recycling and how materials such as plastic spoons could be
Best Practice Projects

used to create ants! It educated them in a different yet creative way about how habitats and species can be affected by dropping litter. The children actively got involved in cutting out material to make the leaves and weave threads and wools onto a mat to make the 'woodland floor'.

The sculpture is publicly displayed and used at fairs and events across the borough all year round to show people and raise awareness about what can be achieved with recycled materials and also to raise awareness and educate people about Richmond's Biodiversity Action Plan in a new and innovative way. The sculpture is currently on display at Richmond's Council offices and has been used at other stakeholders (who are involved in the BAP) offices such as Richmond Park and London Wetland Centre. It also was used at the Richmond Park Open Weekend, which raised a lot of attention and was of particular interest to children.
'Biodiversity by stealth' was a term coined by the SUN Project to describe biodiversity activities promoted or designed in such a way as to be non-technical and as inclusive as possible. It was found that the term 'biodiversity is generally not understood by the general public. Events that are named 'Biodiversity...'can be perceived that they require specialist knowledge and skills, and seem daunting and exclusive and so put off the majority of the public that we wanted to engage. Participants on Stealth projects were encouraged and engaged by means of a 'lure' usually non-biodiversity related. Once people arrived at events the message about biodiversity was illustrated to inspire further involvement. This method proved to be very successful in engaging those who would not usually get involved in biodiversity projects - and the retention of engagement proved fairly successful once the message was explained, as they realised that biodiversity projects did not have to be specialist or exclusive.
Biodiversity by Stealth

Advantages

- Initially attracts large numbers to events & generates captive audiences
- Appeals to 'new faces' that would not initially be attracted from usual biodiversity events, as well as the usual participants

Some of the Stealth projects were aimed around festivities, drama art & physical exercise. Some case studies of these events follow:

**Bromley Walking Festival**
Bromley identified walkers and ramblers as a key stakeholder group, so the festival promoted walking and access to green spaces, and talks encouraged people to appreciate and learn about the biodiversity value of these spaces.

**Sutton Tree Extravaganza**
A tree festival was based on a lure of a local tree surgeon climbing the historic London Plane Tree at the Ecology Centre. A free climbing wall with instructors was offered to members of the public who attended the event. Once visitors had participated in the free event they got involved in tree identification, bark rubbing and recycled paper making activities.
Biodiversity by Stealth

**Hounslow/CIP - Biodrama and Wild @ Art**
The events targeted Ethnic minority groups not involved in the BAP Process. It identified activities that the groups were comfortable with such as art, textiles and drama. The workshops then introduced them to biodiversity through that activity such as art and plays inspired by local wildlife and wildlife issues.

**Sowing the Seeds of love in Redbridge**
This event linked in with the calendar event of Valentines Day. Participants were encouraged to wear red and plant trees and dedicate them with love pledges and messages. Once volunteers had participated they also got involved in sowing wild flower seeds to convert a disused tarmac area into a wildflower meadow. Many volunteers attended and participated in further biodiversity projects.

**Mistletoe walk in Home Park, Richmond**
Richmond made use of the calendar events - specifically Valentines Day in this case to encourage participation. The event was marketed as a valentine's event and was even showcased on the National TV news & weather. The event consisted of a guided walk in the park with a special focus on mistletoe, which is an important species for both London and Richmond and stated in the BAP. The innovative means of marketing meant that the event was well attended by not only the usual suspects, but also
Biodiversity by Stealth

many new faces. They were all delivered the biodiversity message about the importance of the species, once engaged on the valentines walk.

Results from Stealth events:
- Evaluation forms from the Bromley Walking festival showed that 66% of respondents wanted to find out more and get involved in the BAP
- Sutton's Tree extravaganza attracted double the number of new visitors to the Ecology Centre compared to usual biodiversity events
- Hounslow/CIP attracted new audiences to events including ethnic minority groups such as Asian women at the Wild@Art event
- Over 300 people attended the Redbridge Fairlop Bunny Hop
- 65 People attended the Valentines Mistletoe walk in Richmond
Publicity

Publicity and awareness was a large part of the project. Each partner was involved in many awareness raising activities on behalf of the project. This was done to aid further engagement of stakeholders, report on good progress, and to allow other organisations to learn best practice and get involved in the projects.

Some of the ways in which the SUN project was advertised and promoted were in the following:

- Newspaper & Magazine articles
- National News
- Posters & Banners
- Conferences & Presentations
- Leaflets & Brochures
- Art & Interpretation
- Local Radio
- Workshops
- Newsletters
- Project Website
- School Work-packs
Conclusions

The issues of urban biodiversity management highlighted through the SUN Project are common to all urban local authorities across Europe. Local Authorities have to ensure that biodiversity is protected and improved within communities. The outputs of the SUN Project can be reproduced by any local authority or organisation to help improve urban biodiversity in their area. The community consultation and policy integration models developed by the project can also be applied to other urban sustainable development issues.

Community consultation, action planning, stakeholder engagement and implementation process models have been developed by the work of the SUN Project. These are all
Conclusions

transferable to other organisations across Europe and can be applied to a wide range of environmental problems.

The work of the SUN Project has enabled large numbers of urban greenspace sites to be developed and their biodiversity value improved. Large numbers of stakeholders have been engaged in the BAP process, which has enabled thorough consultation in the BAP planning process and a large workforce for innovative implementation projects. Habitats have been restored and species conserved through many individual projects. Lastly, a legacy for awareness of urban biodiversity issues and solutions has been set by all the project partners, which will carry on through exciting programmes for continual biodiversity improvements and sustainable urban greenspace planning across London and Europe.

For more information on the SUN Project go to: www.sun-project.org