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BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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Witnesses: Noel Farrer and Iain Taylor

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Members present

Baroness O'Cathain (Chairman)
 Baroness Andrews
 Lord Clement-Jones
 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff
 Lord Inglewood
 Baroness Parminter
 Baroness Rawlings
 Baroness Whitaker
 Lord Woolmer of Leeds
 Baroness Young of Old Scone

Examination of Witnesses

Noel Farrer, President, Landscape Institute, and **Iain Taylor**, Director of Business Development, Land Trust

Q121 The Chairman: A very big welcome to this evidence session of the Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment. You have in front of you a list of the interests that have been declared by members of the Committee. A transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the Committee website, and you will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary. Could I begin by asking each of you to introduce yourself briefly to the Committee, please? This is for the record, and everything we say or do is going to be on the record.

Noel Farrer: I am Noel Farrer. I am president of the Landscape Institute. The Landscape Institute represents landscape planners, landscape architects and landscape managers. Approximately two-thirds of our members work in the private sector. The remaining one-third work in the public sector. Our members are of a vast range; they are from master planners for both town and country, and the development and management of both. Our members are place-makers who pursue high-quality design and economic benefit, and multifunctional landscapes, in support of health and well-being. We are really a very broad church indeed.

The profession makes major contributions to the new challenge of resilience to the impact of climate change, and strongly supports the imperatives surrounding sustainability, in both development and management of irreplaceable natural resources. The profession sits at the interface between people and natural systems.

Key policy themes that we are addressing at the moment at the Landscape Institute are obviously green infrastructure, which is a huge ongoing topic for us, the awareness of that and enriching the awareness of that. Being able to be here to do that and to talk very much on that topic today is a fantastic opportunity, and actually our first. For the Landscape Institute as a professional chartered body, this is the very first time that we have been asked to provide oral information to a Select Committee. We are grateful for that, but it also shows the emerging importance of green infrastructure, which has been identified by you, which has brought us here. I hope that this will not be the last time and that we may be seeing much more of each other, as this is a particularly important issue.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for that, and thank you for your compliments.

Iain Taylor: Good morning. My name is Iain Taylor. I am the Director of Business Development for the Land Trust. We are a national open space and land management charity with about 50 sites under management in 2,000 hectares of land across the country. Like Noel, we are very interested in this agenda. This is our bread and butter. This is what we get out of bed for in the morning and what we believe in passionately, so I am very pleased to be part of this session today. Thank you for inviting us.

Q122 The Chairman: Thank you for coming and giving up your time. I know it is quite a lump out of your day, but we try to motor fairly rapidly through it. You have had the questions, of course. I will take the first one. What role should green infrastructure have in the planning process? How can it be effectively prioritised? What policy changes are needed to facilitate this? In alphabetical order, Mr Farrer first.

Noel Farrer: I always get to go first. Thank you for that. First, green infrastructure, as I just alluded to, is a fundamental piece of the jigsaw. Green infrastructure is not just green as in environmental green. Yes, it is about water; yes, it is about soil. It is about all the landscape spaces and all our public realm. Green infrastructure is not just our parks and our open spaces. It is very much also our streets and the little areas on the housing estates where we live. We cannot conveniently just see green infrastructure as the pieces that we can lock between dawn and dusk, somewhere down the road in the park where the children can play. The whole of the green infrastructure agenda is where people live. It is around the houses, in the streets, in every part of our towns and cities, and in our rural communities.

We cannot be complacent about green infrastructure in our rural communities. We are probably going to be discussing the fact that we need to build on a significant amount of our

rural communities, which are perhaps going to become urban communities. I find in the rural environment that walking to school is just as difficult, and perhaps even more so in a rural village, as it is walking on a pavement in a town. Green infrastructure is absolutely everywhere.

Answering the second part of the question about how it can be prioritised effectively and what changes need to happen, we see that green infrastructure has perhaps lost traction in its policy support through the emergence of NPPF from previous planning policy and stripping out a lot of planning policy, and the party concerns with regard to top-down, bottom-up and the sort of thinking that has happened over the last number of decades. We now have a huge void that exists between national policy and the next layer, which is local plans and neighbourhood plans.

We have lost a large chunk of the middle ground. We have a void there, which we believe could be filled with some sort of national spatial strategy, perhaps based on the Natural England landscape character areas work that has already been done. It is a piece of work about enabling, about recognising that our landscapes are about change, seeing that as an absolutely necessary and positive process that has to take place. We feel that guidance in that area and work in that area are going to deliver more clarity. Where we now perhaps have this absolute urgent necessity for larger-scale development, developers are blundering around and do not have clarity about public/private partnership and about what it is that towns and cities want to see delivered to give them certainty about their business planning. To give them more clarity is going to support and enable more houses more quickly, if that is our immediate agenda, but quality of development generally.

Iain Taylor: We see a lot of mention across the country of the value of green infrastructure. It has had its moments over the last few years, but it has really become a second-tier aspect of the development process. For us, green infrastructure can deliver good development. If we are in the business of sustainable development, good development and high value multi-functional development, then green infrastructure has to have a valuable part in that process.

We are very good at planning for grey infrastructure. We are very good at thinking about services, data, communications, roads, highways, streetlights, et cetera. We know how to plan, model and think about that strategically and, indeed, assess developments on their impact at local and regional level, in terms of grey infrastructure. We are very good at that.

What we do not do particularly well is think about how the green infrastructure components of development are connected into those much broader landscapes. When you are thinking about development, when you are going through a process to get approval for that development, we think it would add significant value to the end product if green infrastructure was afforded the comparable degree of importance that grey infrastructure gets currently.

Q123 Baroness Andrews: We heard from the TCPA and CPRE that there is only one reference to green infrastructure in the whole NPPF. In fact, Dr Ellis said that that was being heavily compromised by the pressure on development and the planning by appeal process. Is that your experience? My second question is: how often are you called in to help with master planning of major developments?

Noel Farrer: There is only the one reference and I alluded to that. There is a distinct weakness about that, which is clearly why we are here. It needs strengthening in that area. Perhaps it is about the clarity of what green infrastructure is. It is misunderstood. Developers see green infrastructure sitting on the wrong side of the balance sheet. At the end of the day, they sell houses and they sell floor space, whether that is commercial or whatever that is.

I am a practising landscape architect and I do a lot of work. Alluding to the other part of your question, we are not asked in early enough. It is not seamlessly integrated because it is something that developers want and wish to be able to do. That is a generalisation. As you know, there is a range of developers, as there is everywhere else, and there are some developers who are far better at this than others. Certainly it is fair to say that they do not necessarily see this just as something that is nice to have but: can we afford it, or is this something else that we are shoving on the bottom line of a development that is going to cause us a problem in our viability?

This is why I want to see some teeth that are going to put significant pressure and raise awareness of these key component issues, so that developers see the value. There is no question that the value is more for the long-term benefit of the communities that are going to carry on, but there are genuine benefits. There is no question that green open space and the consideration of quality places where people can meet and feel safe, all these things, have a significant value. They have a significant value at the point of sale, because it just gets better and better in landscape terms.

Baroness Andrews: This is a really crude question, but in order for us to make that argument, can you quantify the benefits? Can you monetise them? Can you show that there are key developments in this country where people have bought houses that have been above the market rate because they want the green access, the green environment and all the things you are talking about?

Iain Taylor: There are so many studies that point to the quality of the environment adjacent to property. Properties, both commercial and residential, affronting high-value green spaces, parks, canals and rivers are 20%, 30% or 40% more valuable than adjacent counterparts that share the amenity but lack that kind of connection to it. We know through studies over the years the land value, the development value and ultimately the end value.

One thing that planning can do is look across the benefits of a site at the contribution that development can make to the broader community. It can take a more holistic view. Yes, a developer is looking for his exit, your landowner is looking for an exit, and even the person buying a house one day might want to find an exit, but it is our role, partly through the planning system and partly through the way we look after our affairs, to think about the wider suite of benefits in health and well-being that accrue from sites, and the whole agenda on the value of green infrastructure, which is well written and well evidenced, and bring that value to bear on the development.

One thing the Land Trust brings to this conversation is, when we think about open space, we think about it in perpetuity. We are not interested in the value of green space during the development process or while the units are being let. We think about what that value is for ever for that community. When you ask yourself how that green infrastructure delivers its value and benefits for ever, you open a box on all the opportunities that are available, the rationale and the justification for why it should be delivered to value in the first place.

Noel Farrer: You know that it is a complicated question. You have asked it because you know it is very difficult to prove, but it has been. There is a whole range of studies. But landscape by its nature is very complex. What is the value of walking down a street that allows you to feel safe? What is the value of a view? What is the value of these key components? You know that you want to live in the house that is overlooking the park, not the one that is overlooking the Westway or a road. It is a fact that if you are living overlooking a huge piece of infrastructure, you are likely not to live as long as if you are overlooking a park. A park is

not only a beautiful thing and something that gives you recreation; it is a much healthier place to be as well, so there is a lot of common sense about this.

The other point to make is that legislation was passed through DCMS in 2005, when we did Design for Play—I was involved with the urban fabric. What was very interesting about that was that the Government put together a £235 million package to upgrade our playgrounds across the country. That piece of work was based upon the fact that they were asked a very similar question: can you prove that by investing in children's play you are going to see improvement? The reality is that, again, that is incredibly difficult to do. It is incredibly difficult to prove that it is the act of playing in a playground, in pure academic terms, that delivers an improvement in quality of life and those children's development, but you know that it is true, and it is true.

Landscape is like that in a way. It is its complexity that is its richness and its real compelling value. You are right: we live in a neoliberal world and we have to convince the Treasury of pounds and pence when it comes to improvement. I think we can do it now. The Policy Exchange has done a number of studies on being able to really help us with this, all the way through to other studies as well.

The Chairman: Do you think the builders are convinced that this is right? They seem to squeeze new houses into plots and then do not even give decent gardens. Everybody who goes to a new house spends the first two years in their gardens getting rid of builders' rubble. They have no conception of the holistic approach to life. We are talking about living in a space. How can we change that?

Iain Taylor: The key is to recognise that landowners and developers working through these schemes all have a very different approach.

The Chairman: They are all working in silos, are they?

Iain Taylor: They all have their own approach to their business model. Some will be into a community with several sites and be looking to bring forward phased developments over 10, 20 or 30 years. They will want to build a reputation of value. They will want to build on a reputation of quality. They will want their developments to be heralded as successful, even award-winning, but developers that are small and medium, or more opportunistic, will see a development as a single development site in a single local authority area. Frankly, it is whatever they can get away with sometimes.

We therefore need a conversation that applies to all development and that is about value and quality, and at the planning stage affords the opportunity for those appraising the scheme and involved in their design to fully understand the contribution that scheme can make. Then we do not get into distinguishing between the volume housebuilders, which are building reputation, learning lessons and taking these ideas forward because they have a stake in those sites' future, and those at the smaller end, the single-site developers.

Noel Farrer: I will add to that. There is no point in pretending; there is just more money down here in the south-east. Land values are higher. What people are prepared to pay and can pay for houses is higher. There is no question that there is more and better opportunity to see money being spent on landscape in the south-east. If you head up to the towns and the cities in the north, where the values are not as high, it is perfectly reasonable that at the end of the day private companies and large PLC companies acting as developers, whether they are volume housebuilders or small housebuilders, are in it for profit. There is nothing wrong with that. Legally, the number one thing that they have to do is provide a return for shareholders.

When it comes to GI, the easiest point for them is, first, the private space. A private garden sits slightly on the right side of the balance sheet. They do not necessarily do it very well, and you alluded to that, Lord Chairman, by suggesting that they might just park the building rubble underneath the turf, and they do. I do not think all developers do that, of course, but it is true: we find a lot of that and soil is not respected or looked after at all. The key point is that the private garden has some value, and sometimes they will carve whole sites into the private garden.

What is really sitting on the wrong side of the balance sheet for them, and perhaps gives local authorities problems that then have to deal with, is the public space in relation to housing. It is those areas where the real pressure comes. The reality is that it is in our streets and in those public spaces where children can play, where the elderly can meet and not be lonely, and all the rest of it, where real life happens, needs to happen safely and needs to happen healthily and well. Those areas are becoming particularly starved, and it seems to me that that is the public/private agenda. The public part of this contract, through the local authority and the strategic planning and visioning, must have absolute clarity about what they want for their places, what they want for their towns, the distinctiveness and the character of the places they want to see made. That is when the developer can at least have

clarity about what they are going to have to do, so that they can get on with it, knowing what is going to need to be provided there.

Q124 Baroness Whitaker: Mr Taylor referred to a national conversation with developers. Are you talking about a role for national leadership—leadership from the centre in this case? Do you have any ideas about how?

Iain Taylor: Precisely. The issue is one of leadership. Who is our national champion for sustainable places of quality? Who is that spokesperson for this agenda? Who is arguing the corner with colleagues in education, health, environment, business and communities? We have, over time, had organisations and partnerships that were established to show leadership and show the community at large what good looked like. A lot of the advice that came through those organisations found its way into policy and into the mainstream, but in recent times we have moved away from that approach. One thing that we would call for within this opportunity and this conversation would be to extend it and to find those natural leaders, not to create new organisations, overhead or hurdles but some momentum and positivity in this conversation. That will flush out not only national leaders but leaders within housebuilders, leaders within planners and leaders within local authorities, who will step up and say, “We are doing this. We know what good looks like”, but you need somebody at the heart of Government to give the confidence that this is time well spent and that moving forward on this agenda is worth while. It is difficult at the moment. There are a number of competing objectives and this needs to be prioritised higher.

The Chairman: Can I just ask a question? You have triggered something in my mind. What about having a trade association for landscaping or for place-makers? Well-run trade associations, such as the civil engineers’ or the mechanical engineers’, have impact, which means a lot when dealing with Government. Engineering itself has something like 50 institutions, which is what they call them but they are actually trade associations. They probably would not like to be told that, but they get things done. Think of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. This is so important.

We are not talking about builders; we are talking about the impact of space on our lives and the health implications, the future of our children and grandchildren, and trees on which they can have swings and things like this. It sounds idyllic, but it is doable. If it is all so fragmented and you are being played off against other competing tasks, it is not going to happen.

Iain Taylor: Noel will pick up on the association side at the professional level, but it is really about the agenda. We know we have 100,000 members of the Institution of Civil Engineers and 5,000 members in the green infrastructure sector. We are massively outgunned, if you like, in terms of representation. There is an issue of numbers. Over recent years, we have seen, with public local authorities' resources being constrained and focused on statutory services, these discretionary areas of work, planning and strategic thinking about green infrastructure and open space, having to—it is not through choice but necessity—be lost from the local authority contribution to the development space. We have seen, frankly, a bit of a vacuum emerging, where we are not able to engage with those people who were in post five or 10 years ago to create some momentum. It is really about slightly nudging the agenda to imagine that green and grey infrastructure—and blue infrastructure, for that matter—being a fundamental, and I hesitate to say statutory, part of what makes our cities, towns and rural areas work.

The Chairman: Even if it is only a small number, you can still make a big impact.

Iain Taylor: Correct. I agree with that.

Q125 Lord Inglewood: I would like to put to you that perhaps the biggest problem of all is the fault of accountancy. We live in a world where natural capital and ecosystem services simply are not permitted to enter into the profit and loss and the balance sheets that are used to judge a lot of these things. That, perhaps more than anything else, may be the beginning of the problem. Following on from that, do each of you have any particular ideas about what might be done in simple terms to improve matters?

Noel Farrer: It is about accountancy, and you are absolutely right to pick that up. In a way, that is a key problem. We have alluded to it already. The private sector is where we are going to see the changes and where development is going to take place, and the private sector is therefore going to evolve around profit. Landscape is vulnerable in that world, even though we are a country of gardeners. Going back to the allusion to the different trade organisations, we have 250,000 members in the Royal Horticultural Society. We are absolutely passionate about landscape. We all recognise the value of what landscape is going to bring. It is interesting that while that is a passion it does not find its way to any statutory point.

Iain was hesitant to use the word “statutory”. Let me be a little less hesitant about it. The reality is that our park services in our local authorities are not statutory. There is no

statutory obligation to maintain parks. There is no statutory obligation for local authorities to look after the green infrastructure that we are talking about. But the reality, as we now recognise—frankly, it has always been like this—is that it does not have the teeth. It is vulnerable to the accountants. It sits on the wrong side of the balance sheet, and it requires more of a commitment. The commitment has been lost in the middle ground in planning and in the national strategy. A commitment on the public side of that equation, which is where the change needs to take place, because we are talking mainly about the public benefit, needs to be re-established in a way that cannot be forgotten. It is just about accountancy. That is where the problem lies.

Baroness Andrews: Do you think it would have more impact if we could get across the fact that we are losing the battle on sustainability? You are talking about one element of sustainable development, yet sustainable development has lost purchase. It is in the NPPF. It is not in recent legislation. We had big battles over the Growth and Infrastructure Bill, because we lost the definition of sustainability. If we could recover that in a statutory form, do you think that would help you to position what you see as so important?

Noel Farrer: It would help. It is interesting that in the agonies of what sustainability is, and we have all juggled with that and what it means, there is something about the complexity of that that has become the problem. It is not like, “I am an architect. I design a building”. In my profession, I am a landscape architect. If I go and speak to someone and say, “I am a landscape architect”, they say, “Why do you not come out and have a look at my garden?”. That is it. It is great to come here, talk about green infrastructure and grapple with this absolutely compelling subject, but it is a misunderstood concept. Our issue and our first and foremost piece of work as a profession is to do with awareness and the importance of this piece, which is everything from the edge of the building to our rivers, our streets, our towns and our countries, and joining all those things up, but it does not have primacy.

Iain Taylor: Picking up your point about the accountants’ approach and the balance-sheet narrative, one interesting component of this is that green infrastructure sits on the right side of the balance sheet, but there are five different balance sheets. It helps with school attainment. It helps with obesity and mental health. It helps with a number of balance sheets for various aspects of the Government’s work in our communities, but we do not fully aggregate that value and think about how we deliver it upfront. We try to focus on where the value is generated within the development process, because that is where the cash is.

One thing that we are thinking about is how you fund the in-perpetuity management, maintenance and capital replacement of these open spaces so that we do not get into a serial regeneration of our open spaces in towns and cities. This is a national issue. We work in parks and open spaces in the south-east, the south-west, the north and Yorkshire, so we have a broad understanding of the factors at play. Indeed, the Land Trust came out of a coalfields programme by Government, recognising that these spaces had a contribution to make for ever. There is a very nuanced view of value and how we appraise it, but I absolutely agree that it is time for sustainable development to come back and be at the heart of our processes.

Lord Inglewood: Is it not the same issue that Church Commissioners have identified? They have a lot of buildings that are going to be very expensive in perpetuity. In their case, their solution is to offload them on to other people.

Iain Taylor: What you do then in that process of offloading is attribute who benefits in a much more specific and direct way. We could get on to this; a later question talks about models for sustainability, but essentially if you could connect very directly those who benefit from that infrastructure and those who pay, you would create a naturally sustainable virtuous circle. We have done this for years; they are called service charges and estate charges. You would make a direct transaction between those who benefit and those who pay.

One thing that we are really getting switched on about at the Land Trust, working with the volume housebuilders in particular, is to create more of a membership or a community focus on service charges, so that we can lose this negative “It is just another bill” approach. “Actually, I pay my £100 or £150, and look at what I get. I am part of this fantastic community. They throw great events. The place looks great. I am proud to walk people around my open spaces”. Site by site, if we can restore that link between value and who benefits, there is real future in this.

Now the question is: where do you go when they exist already? One thing that we are wrestling with is whether our parks and open spaces are the right proportion, the right size, for the communities they serve. They do not all come from beautifully well-executed master plans. Some of them were flukes, accidents, by-products of clearance, et cetera. One thing we need to look at in a lot more detail is whether we can associate the value of public development with the in-perpetuity management of those open spaces so that we realise

the value of some of these spaces for the benefit of the whole community. This is where it gets involved, quite technical and very local, but if we could have a national perspective on this it would create the space for those conversations to happen all over the country.

Q126 Baroness Rawlings: I fully support all the green space, the environment and everything that you have said. I am aware that costs always play a role in that. What is your view? You have just touched on parks and things. I get really upset when these wonderful parks, which are there for everybody, get used for markets and pop concerts. They then get negated for what they were meant to be used for: the peace, health and everything for everybody. What is your answer to that? You create a green space and then, before you know it, you have people planning to have a pop concert on it.

Noel Farrer: Why are they planning to have a pop concert on it? We are on the framework contract for the Royal Parks here in London. Hyde Park is regularly used as a venue. The best part of half of their income needs to be derived from their own capital receipts. Their contract was with central government, which paid for the Royal Parks. It is now with the mayor. The reality is that that sum of money is not going up any time soon. That sum of money is going down. However passionately we link those Royal Parks and the quality of those landscapes to our great city, the reality is that that goes down. How are the Royal Parks crossing that?

They are doing this. Coffee is pretty expensive if you go to a franchise in the Royal Parks. You can go to pop concerts. They are allocating areas of park. The Frieze contemporary arts show is a brilliant event. Do not get me wrong; I think it is incredibly positive how the Royal Parks reconcile the types of activities that they are putting in place with what they have to do, but fundamentally they are doing it. They totally understand that. They know that there is a compromise between the maintenance of a beautiful green space, the acid grassland that is in that area, the biodiversity and the nature of the landscape that you are referring to, which we should all be able to enjoy, and then allowing 80,000 people in there for three days to enjoy a pop concert. I am perhaps less aerated about that concern, because I think it is a great use of public open space for 80,000 people to enjoy it who perhaps would not otherwise.

Baroness Rawlings: They could not go to the Albert Hall or all the other places where you can have pop concerts, like the O2 Arena?

Noel Farrer: I understand that, but the key point here is that they have to do it because they need the money and they need to be able to maintain it. In a way, that alludes to exactly the same point: how important is that, and how much money should we give to them?

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: I have been fascinated listening to you talk about the benefits to health and to the individual, and wonder whether anyone has done any work on using the concept of QALYs, such as are used in healthcare by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, to show the benefit of exposure and access to green spaces, so that you begin to talk the same language on the balance sheet that is used for things like health interventions and see whether you can do the same for social cohesion, dysfunctional behaviour, costs of crime, and educational attainment. You could begin to use Lord Inglewood's balance sheet to be much more complex but much more informative than a simple kind of in/out accounting sheet. Then you can come up with a formula that feeds into planning decisions on what should and needs to be in place in order to secure the future health of a population that lives there.

Iain Taylor: We have surveyed people who visit our sites and asked them whether these spaces are of value to them, have helped with their personal circumstances and have moved things on. Unreservedly, we get positive outcomes from that.

Interestingly you can point to specific examples such as the work of Community Forests, which is a sector across this country. It has a project that it has called the Natural Health Service, which works with GP practices to provide opportunities to engage in local parks and open spaces as an alternative to medication or more invasive practices. It is using the environment in a way that is positive for its outcomes and personal circumstances. It is not simply about going for a walk. Often there are personal issues to do with perceptions of safety or insecurity that prevent people from engaging with these open spaces, so they have to be supported through it, but the outcomes are so much better.

We know that when we link aspects of the health service at a local level with the value to health and well-being that the parks and open spaces provide, we get tremendous outcomes. Of course, these are often publicly-funded two to three-year projects. They always have a start, they have a fantastic middle phase, and then they have to end at some point. That is one thing that we really fall over. We do not plan and we do not fund over the timescales that can really allow these structures to bed in.

One thing that we have talked about in relation to vision is where the long plan is for this agenda. Where is the 25-year rolling, reviewable plan that actually says what kind of place we want this country to be? As sure as eggs are eggs, you determine your value of a place and your experience of it by the natural components. Yes, the buildings are beautiful or are an issue, but you certainly get a sense of what a place is like from the blue and green infrastructure, yet there is simply no plan.

Noel Farrer: There is some interesting research that helps to start to join these things together. It is a simple, known fact that if you have a ward in a hospital that overlooks green space rather than an urban area, less morphine is used on that ward. If you have a closed ward and there are landscape paintings on the wall rather than paintings of other subjects, that is also true. That is how compelling that is.

We know this from looking at mental health issues. A number of experiments have been done with people who are suffering from depression. If you walk them through a busy shopping centre and then ask them how they feel at the other end of that, having done a 15-minute walk, or you walk them through the adjacent park in the opposite direction, they feel a damn site better when they have walked through the park. These are common-sense issues.

How compelling are they in terms of what they are going to say? I know that we can go to Abbey Orchard Estate, which is a Peabody estate on the orchard site of Westminster Abbey and is five minutes from here. We had a scheme there where we turned an empty space with 46 car parking spaces into a green courtyard with trees, and a small park space within that courtyard, with places to sit and places to play. I can introduce you to Norman, who lives in flat 8, block A. He will tell you that he was a very lonely man who did not feel comfortable about going out. He did not feel safe in the streets and was leading a particular type of life that I believe was also perhaps a very expensive type of life, with home help, meals on wheels, support and all the other aspects and support services in our society.

I can go round and have a cup of tea with Norman now, nearly eight years after we have finished our work there. He is one of the people who goes out. He does planting work and has now re-engaged his relationship with the children on the estate. He plants the plants, he works with them. He won second prize in a Westminster in Bloom competition, and in my office that is the award that we cherish most. It is that simple. We can take that stroll any time you like and I think you will find that the GI message is compelling. You are right:

getting it into a condition so that we can put it on to an accountant's sheet in an intelligent way aerates us and needs to be worked upon.

Q127 Baroness Parminter: I was surprised in your evidence that you did not mention the work done by the Natural Capital Committee and its initiative to try to bring natural capital into the accounts of the nation and to have them in the GreenBook by 2020. If that was achieved, to my mind that could be a very important way to encourage businesses to get green infrastructure and other natural capital on their business accounts.

Noel Farrer: In their assets, yes.

Baroness Parminter: Indeed. I wondered if you would share the view that that initiative is important. It was set up under the last Government. Should this Committee be ensuring that necessary financial resources and political support are retained for that initiative, which could have far-reaching benefits?

Noel Farrer: It is very interesting. Thinking about my membership, there are slightly mixed views about this. For me personally, the notion that we have a natural capital that we absolutely value involves trying to put a financial construct on it, which is helpful. I am aware that that committee answers directly to the Treasury, which would seem to give us a route one track into the right place and being able to gain traction. There is no question that if companies can recognise the value of their asset as natural capital and it sits on their balance sheet as an asset, that means they are more likely to invest in it. I would say that in the most basic terms I am fundamentally supportive of it, and I think we are. We would absolutely encourage that.

I have a slight nervousness about putting those values together and saying, "How valuable is it?". I have a site down the road from here where there is an oak tree on the corner of a street. This is slightly theoretical, but it is true; I have done this many times before. I do not want someone to turn around and say, "That oak tree is worth £25,000", because I know in London that a developer is going to turn around and say, "Here is your £25,000. I am now going to chop it down". I have a slight concern about that, because I want to say to that developer, "It is absolutely priceless and you cannot chop it down". There is always that issue for me slightly, but the fundamental principle of the leverage of being able to value something so that we can have a conversation about it in that way is very useful.

Iain Taylor: I would build on that. There was real momentum prior to the Committee's recommendations to understand the value of the natural environment and the functions

that it provides. That has led to conversations about payments for ecosystem services and trying to articulate the transaction between those who benefit, those who provide and those who sustain. We understand that while those recommendations were positive and at the time created a huge sense that things were going to improve, there was not a great deal of recognition across Government for what those recommendations meant. They were good but not fully endorsed by Government across all departments, so that we can get on with the process of interpreting them and getting on with the job. For us, from a green infrastructure perspective, if more actors within Government could adopt those recommendations, we think that work really would have some value in support of this sector specifically.

Baroness Whitaker: Is there not more to be done if we are going to scale up these considerations? The issue is that green infrastructure has benefits all round. The trouble is that a government department, if it is going to sponsor legislation or guidance, will perhaps be, say, Defra, but the benefits will accrue to the Department of Health, so they will not necessarily have the same force of argument when it is all worked out in Cabinet. Do you see any way round this?

Noel Farrer: Yes, I do. The problem you raise is absolutely right, and the point that we are making first is that whether you are in the Home Office and you want to make places safer and more secure through design of public realm space, whether you are in Education because school grounds and all that estate is absolutely fantastically valuable to the development of our children, whether you are in Health, about which you are very clear, across all the departments of government landscape has a key role to play, and this goes back to the silos point that we alluded to earlier, if you will excuse me. This is a fundamental area whereby GI can fall between the tracks, but its potency is about coming up with a voice that allows each and every department to recognise that their push, in a co-ordinated way, is fundamental.

One piece of traction which the Farrell review proposed was the idea that we should have a built environment chief adviser in the Government somewhere. The reality is that some format of that is needed, including how education sees the value of landscape, how health sees the promotions of landscape in their piece of work, how Defra is perhaps closer to being the vehicle to be able to administer that, however that might work, and then obviously

planning and planning legislation. There needs to be some way of co-ordinating that. The fact that it is not co-ordinated is a really sad loss to the potency of GI.

Iain Taylor: A key way to articulate the relevance and importance of any agenda is to hop on to the big one. For the last five years or so, economic growth has been the big one. Everything, frankly, has been about its contribution to economic growth. How can we accelerate economic growth? How can we support economic growth? What can we do across the land to support government's objectives in relation to economic growth?

There are strategies that we have been a part of, such as the "Atlantic Gateway Parklands: The Landscape for Prosperity", which make a very direct link between a long-term, long-ranging environmental master plan in support of the economy, not running against development aspirations, not taking a principled view on the economy itself, just showing, case by case, aspect by aspect, how GI and a broader natural environment can accelerate economic growth.

When you get into that space, as the Land Trust is doing, of facilitating development, understanding how to capitalise on its value, supporting the growth of towns and cities, once you get into a much more positive space about economic growth and development, you find that people want to engage in a positive non-whingeing debate. There are too many reasons to be glum, to whinge, to moan, but who has the time for it? We want to engage in a positive conversation about development. We want to make the economy stronger. The environment and GI have a role in that space, and we just do not play that card strongly enough nationally. There is some good leadership in the regions, but nationally it is not quite there.

Noel Farrer: It is no coincidence that Barcelona is always held up as an urban town and a very desirable place to live. On a happiness index that I have seen, the people in Barcelona seem very happy people. They are 1.4 million people there. They buy their food in their local markets; over 90% of all food in Barcelona is bought in local markets. There are 96 markets. It works on a human scale, and GI is a living, vibrant thing in that city. Catalonia represents over 75% of the entire GDP of Spain, which is why it will never become an independent nation, because Spain will never be rid of it. The reality, in simple economic terms, is that the desirability and the quality of the place are fundamentally driven by its green infrastructure and landscape considerations. It creates a place where people want to be; it creates a place that is desirable for them to wish to come to, to live in, to work in, to be innovative in, to be

creative in and to generate money and economic growth. Barcelona is a classic example of that. There are many others. Beautiful cities make more money.

Q128 Lord Woolmer of Leeds: The way that you speak, Mr Farrer, indicates your view of green infrastructure as not necessarily green but something rather wider. A public understanding of that debate could be helpful. Do you think there is a conflict between the pressure for increased housebuilding and higher-density development in urban areas? Do you think that is creating a conflict with providing environmental infrastructure, green infrastructure and sustainable open spaces? In practice, do you think that a conflict has emerged in recent years between the two?

Noel Farrer: I do not necessarily think there is a conflict. I sit on quite a number of design review panels. I am on the national design panel, and the reality is that we are seeing a lot of schemes coming forward that are very dense. In my personal work, I am working on a large housing extension to Bicester, which the Government called a garden city. One requirement of the eco-town principles is that 40% of the land will be designated as public open space. That is actually a huge challenge to the local authority in the future. Another requirement is that densities will sit between 20 and 50 homes per hectare, which is not enough. Actually, what seems like a good idea in planning and thinking in terms of crude rules is very constraining in terms of being able to create quality urban spaces.

The notion of density for me is that landscape is not to be viewed just in terms of its quantum area. It is not about the area; it is about the quality of that space. Just imagine that you have 100 houses on a plot of land and a developer is thinking, "That is great. I have my 100 houses at quite low density", and then someone comes along and says, "Hang on a minute, you have to give a quarter of that away to a public open space. You have to get rid of 25% of the area for the open space". That could be seen as crudely chopping a piece out, so I will only build 75 homes. Clearly not, but the post-war reaction, which you alluded to in the debate that I listened to when we came in, is that you could build a large tower block in the middle of a large green field. Actually, we know that that is not quality. It is not about quantity. It is all about what it is. What is the quality of that environment and the quality of the place that you are trying to make? You are then into the complexities.

We have worked on high-density schemes, which have spaces for children to play and which provide opportunities for people to be able to come out and be able to enjoy a certain amount of green space. We can absolutely employ places where people can meet, talk and

do all the activities that they need to be able to do safely and in a high-quality way. I do not instinctively see a problem between density and providing high-quality GI. We also technically know about aspects of GI to do with the water, microclimate, heat sink effect in cities and increased biodiversity. We can do this vertically, we can do this horizontally, we can do this on roofs. There is also a whole range of technology that is growing hugely as a sector.

Lord Woolmer of Leeds: Mr Farrer, I did not ask you whether you thought it could work together. I am asking you if, in practice in recent years, the pressure for more housing and higher density, in your judgment, has led to a deficiency in sustainable open spaces and green infrastructure.

Noel Farrer: In practice, the answer is yes. I suppose I was alluding to the fact that in practice it does not have to. I am very grateful to you, Lord Woolmer, for pulling me up on that, because you are teasing the answer that I want to give, which is great. I apologise for not getting there quicker. That is absolutely the reality. GI in schemes is often considered too late. It only happens because it needs to happen, perhaps to get certain developers over certain planning hurdles. We do not see enough quality investment in our present housing developments.

Moreover, a lot of the development that I am seeing in the country is building formulaic houses. They could be Windsors and Marlboroughs and whatever else you like. I can see those formulaic houses being built in the Lake District, which is where I live, or they may be being built in Derbyshire or in the south-east. That is nothing to do with GI, distinctive places or a whole range of things. The reality is that at the moment the answer is no. The conversation about raising awareness and trying to understand that public-private relationship so that we can instigate more need around GI is essential.

Iain Taylor: I would say that high-density and high-quality GI are not incompatible. Actually, volume and density are your friends when it comes to safeguarding these infrastructures for the long term. We have seen sites promoted of four or five dwellings, with a 40-acre country park. You think that those four or five dwellings have to have quite broad shoulders to support that 40-acre country park. When you have 2,000 dwellings supporting a 40-acre country park, if it is planned well, if it is well delivered, if it is of high quality, it will last for ever. The collective burden is unchanged, but each unit can afford it. It is an affordability issue. There is a viability issue in all of this. The purpose of having the ability to plan and

think strategically, across all the sectors, is what enables you to come up with the right answer.

Q129 Baroness Whitaker: Both of you commented in your evidence on a skills and expertise shortage in various areas. What are your ideas about how you would remedy this, including for local government?

Iain Taylor: The skills shortage is an interesting general point about capacity, but actually there is a jobs shortage. There is a role shortage. We have seen that it is not about whether or not the people in post have the skills to undertake a GI conversation. It is just that those posts do not exist at all. One thing we could usefully do is to recalibrate the resource of the process, so that there is a role in which they can share skills and knowledge.

Baroness Whitaker: There should be larger cadres in local government.

Noel Farrer: There could well be. We have a specific subgroup in the Landscape Institute that is looking at the fact that the loss of people working in the public sector and the loss of landscape architects working in local authorities is a significant problem. The landscape architectural role is not a statutory role for local authorities, and local authorities are continuously pared back.

Baroness Whitaker: Do you know how many local authorities employ landscape architects? What proportion is it—a third, a half or about three-quarters?

Noel Farrer: I think it is at most a third. It is very interesting. They range enormously from local authorities that have none to local authorities that have 30. Some local authorities work in that way and get it. I am talking about Hampshire there. That is hugely variable, but it is the loss of knowledge in the role that is absolutely critical. Having someone who really understands the GI position in a local authority and can inform on the local authority side what is happening in development control, what is happening strategically across the departments of a local authority, in the same way we were discussing the silos in central government, is fundamental. We would ask that you consider the idea of recognising that the local authority needs to have some representation of GI at a senior enough level within their local authority organisation to be able to make sure that this representation exists, because they are a fundamental client role to us. They feed the quality that private sector consultants can then work to.

Iain Taylor: We work closely with universities all over the country. One in particular, the University of Liverpool, has a department of civic design to train planners. They have a

self-contained GI unit, which has become really popular with the postgraduates. About half of the people on the planning course take the GI module. That gives me a lot of hope that the next wave of professional planners, whether in private practice or local authorities, have had this kind of education in green infrastructure and elected to have that education in green infrastructure, so they are self-selecting an interest in this agenda that they can take through their professional lives. From no course to 50% is a fantastic achievement.

Baroness Whitaker: Are there any landscape architects in national government? How many are in DCLG?

Noel Farrer: There are not many. One of them was here, but there are very few. Another area where we could make a real difference here is building the knowledge. We are aware that the RTPi provides training to all members who sit in DC and on their planning committees. It would be a good idea to consider that there should be some awareness around GI for members, when considering planning applications. Again, that is further grist on the public side, as well as on the officer side, to add support to that.

The Chairman: That is a very useful point.

Q130 Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: That leads into the next question, which relates to how the positive impact of green infrastructure can be better understood by professions generally in the sector. You have put some ideas on the table. I wonder if, very briefly, you can put some others, possibly almost as a quick wish list, so that the changes needed at national policy level can come through. I say “quickly”, because we are in our last minutes of the session.

Noel Farrer: First, I would acknowledge the problem. It is true that it is not just developers who are perhaps a little ignorant about these things. That can include the consultant teams within development as well, because we want the GI or the landscape consideration to happen. It is a fundamental component of the project; we want that to happen at its earliest possible stage. I absolutely recognise that. We have identified RIBA and other organisations such as that as places where we are trying to raise awareness all of the time. I do not have a specific answer to that problem. Iain, do you?

Iain Taylor: Only that, for example, if LEPs were tasked with fully articulating the role of the natural environment or green infrastructure within their economic growth plans, it would create the space for the conversation whereby the professional community would step forward and deliver that. One wonderful thing about the GI community, as we see from

recent experiences, is it is incredibly efficient at delivering cost-effective positive outcomes for places. We are not talking about suspension bridges and motorway junctions; we are talking about relatively modest investments that yield massive impacts on local places. If we brought in GI, it would blossom.

Some parts of the country have their own GI strategies. Manchester, for example, has done its own GI strategy. Certain parts of the east of England have very clear articulations of the value of the natural environment within their local economic partnerships. It is a mixed bag across the country and they all look for guidance. All the LEPs and local areas look to government for guidance, and we need to have that confidence to provide that leadership that this is an important part of economic growth and an important part of sustainable development. Then there would be a response. I am sure of it.

The Chairman: That was a lovely positive note on which to end, but it is not quite ending yet. Lady Finlay, is there something else you wanted to ask?

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff: No, it is just that I have had a request to go and deal with a problem urgently, so you will have to excuse me for leaving. I am sorry.

Q131 Baroness Parminter: It is difficult because it is about money, so it is not often quick. Can you summarise briefly what financial models are out there at the moment to encourage investment in GI? What suggestions do you have for other financial instruments?

Iain Taylor: On the existing framework, we have a range of endowments, commuted sums, service charges, estate charges and interim charges. We have a full menu of mechanisms with which to align the costs and the value. The Land Trust was created under a programme of endowments from HCA to take on legacy sites, so we have an experience of managing funds invested that can be re-invested year on year, for management capital replacement. We have aspects within the planning system that allow for commuted sums to be paid for the transfer of grey, blue and green infrastructure, so that is a well-trodden path. We know that.

The emerging growth is in relation to the service charge/estates charge component, so increasingly developers are looking to pass on those long-term obligations for open space management to the residents, so that they can participate in that. I see that as a very positive space. Typically you get a mix of endowments or commuted sums with service charges coming forward in the appraisal, which means that the scheme can work.

One interesting thing about the natural environment and GI accelerating development is that in order for it to accelerate development, it has to come first. The GI has to come up front and then there is usually a lag between when you have invested in the GI and when your lovely development happens. The European Investment Bank has this thing called the Natural Capital Financing Facility, whereby it provides cheap money to deliver GI and allow the developments to come forward over time, and in the normal way—commuted sums, section 106, sale or whatever—repay for those investments in green infrastructure.

One thing that really floats my boat is if we could nationally come up with a kind of forward-funding GI approach, which says that we buy into that approach that GI creates good development and it brings it forward. If you bring development forward, you are accelerating economic growth, which is the whole point of this approach to begin with. If, in accelerating economic growth, you have helped children in the local area achieve better grades, fewer GP return visits, et cetera, you are making a much fuller contribution for what is effectively a very low-cost solution. You get the money back.

The Chairman: That is amazing. We have a real time pressure now. I am sorry, do you think you could actually write to us on the point you were going to say? Okay, two minutes then.

Noel Farrer: The last point I was going to make is that the HCA is grappling with this at Ebbsfleet. Ebbsfleet has really ground to a halt, because the landowners who are there are struggling to get viability in relation to a business plan to move it forward. The Government here are putting £200 million into that scheme on GI. It will be spent on putting infrastructure together. In a way, therefore, there is an absolute recognition already that the way to pump prime development and get things going is to invest in GI. The key component is creating this longer-term vehicle to be able to get that value back for the developer. GI is fundamentally a vehicle to be able to accelerate and make change happen, and therefore deliver the quality that we need.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. I am sorry for cutting you short, but I know that I have a few more bits of business and I will not have a quorum if we do not stop now. Thank you both. We have been at it since before 10 o'clock this morning, but it is has been terrific, and thank you so much for engaging so enthusiastically.