

THE GEOGRAPHER: EDITORIAL FOR THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE EDITION

Green infrastructure has become a critical element in urban planning and development. The approach has been around for a long time. For example, the development of garden cities from the late 19th century, the pioneering work of Patrick Geddes (after whom our RSGS environmental medal is named) and the various central Scotland forest and woodland initiatives since the 1970s have sought to improve the landscape and provide space for people to enjoy the outdoors. But, the idea has taken on added significance in Scotland for a number of reasons.

First, the demand for houses has increased enormously and with it a desire for pleasant green surroundings. With the government's commitment to make green infrastructure an intrinsic part of development comes the opportunity to ensure this happens in practice. Allied to this is the circumstantial evidence that inward investors are more attracted to a green and pleasant location than a run down and derelict one. So the onus is on planners to make sure that enforceable conditions are placed on housing and business developers to add a green infrastructure component.

Second, there is the need to do more to stem the effects global climate change. Green infrastructure can make a substantial contribution in a number of ways. Replacing impermeable surfaces with permeable ones by planting trees, shrubs and grass helps to reduce run off from the anticipated heavier rainfall events is an obvious adaptation in urban development. Opening up walkways along rivers and allowing rivers act more naturally helps to reduce flood risk and provide access. And, there are some novel ideas of creating green space to absorb water on the roofs and up the sides of buildings, as well as green troughs along streets.

Which brings me to the third, and I think most important reason for developing green infrastructure – improving human health and lifestyles. The statistics of physical inactivity are alarming: it causes 2,500 premature deaths a year in Scotland costing the health service c£90m. There is irrefutable evidence that outdoor activity reduces stress and the risk of heart disease and mental illness. There are many initiatives, the most brilliant, now being adopted throughout Britain, was developed at St Ninian's Primary School in Stirling for pupils to walk or run a mile a day round the playground.

For all of these reasons, green infrastructure should be a vital part of our villages, towns and cities. Making them more attractive places to live and work and giving us a longer and healthier lives. Still more needs to be done to make sure that all parts of government effectively join up their actions to deliver the benefits.

I hope that you find these articles, arising from a conference in Glasgow in November 2015, stimulating and encourage you to persuade your authorities to do more locally.

Roger Crofts

Chair RSGS