Learning legacy

Lessons learned from the London 2012 Games construction project

Biodiversity Action Plan: Securing ecology objectives for the Olympic Park

Construction of the Olympic Park venues resulted in a loss of 45 hectares of existing nature conservation sites. The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games planning permissions placed an obligation not only to provide a new 45 hectare area, but also to improve the quality of habitat being delivered. The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) uniquely provided the context for delivery of this new habitat and demonstrated it can be done for other major redevelopment sites.

Purpose and development of the BAP

Ecology works within the Park were characterised by three main objectives:

- to protect any retained habitats;
- to provide suitable off-site mitigation; and
- to deliver new and enhanced habitats.

The BAP provided the context for the delivery of new habitat with the Park and was secured in the 2007 Olympic and Legacy Facilities planning permission, by a combination of both condition and Section 106 legal agreement. The BAP was a site-specific document which set out clearly how new habitats would be created in the Park at both Games and post-Games phases, and the means by which these were to be maintained.

The legal agreement specified that pre-submission consultation be undertaken with named stakeholders. It also required accompanying details of a mechanism to ensure monitoring of its implementation and the measurement of successes and their reporting to the Local Planning Authority. Finally, it specified that up to two hectares of off-site construction phase mitigation be undertaken; requiring implementation of the approved BAP.

Implementation and objectives of the BAP

The construction of the Park venues and infrastructure resulted in a loss of an estimated 45 hectares of existing sites of nature conservation value, though some parts were characterised by large stands of invasive species which did not necessarily provide a functional habitat. As such, in order to ensure that the Games development would have no long-term adverse impact on biodiversity, there was an obligation not only to provide the same area for habitat within the Park, but also to improve the quality with the replacement habitat being delivered.

The BAP's overall target, therefore, was to create at least 45 hectares of new habitat by the end of 2014. The replacement habitat was broken down into target areas and locations for various different habitats within the Park, identified in Habitat Action Plans (HAPs). Habitats to be created included: brownfield (including brown roofs), species rich grassland, wet woodland, reed bed and others.

Benefits of the BAP

The Park BAP was a unique product. The majority of BAPs produced in the UK are for much bigger geographical areas (the UK; London; and London

Plants being grown for the 2012 Gardens: the Gardens were an important element of the BAP target for Parkland habitat

Wildlife pond: ponds and wet woodland habitats formed an important part of the BAP

Wild flowers around the Olympic Park: the BAP established over 20 hectares of new species-rich grassland habitat

boroughs for example), with others covering large 'soft estates' (such as that produced by the Highways Agency). The approach to biodiversity in major redevelopment sites has generally involved like for like replacement of particular habitats.

The BAP secured provision of a diverse range of new habitats and species which enhance the biodiversity value of the Park. It also identified the quality of the new habitat to be delivered, including ecotopes which support particular species and the establishment of continuous corridors for wildlife migration. A degree of flexibility was built into the BAP to allow the opportunity to vary elements as design developed, subject to stakeholder agreement. Detailed monitoring and management was required, with progress assessed against measurable habitat and species targets for the Games phase and at the end of the post-Games transformation period.

Other benefits of the adopted approach included relevant stakeholder input. The ODA held a number of workshops with relevant organisations such as Natural England and the London Wildlife Trust, which informed the preparation and content of the document, in compliance with the legal agreement's prior consultation requirements.

The early implementation of two hectares of off-site habitat in mitigation for that lost, specifically during the construction phase of the project, was also a unique element. This was also secured through the planning process. The majority of this area was additional to the 45 hectares of habitat to be created within the Park.

Lessons learned

A clear mechanism for the implementation, monitoring and reporting of achievements should be specified at the outset of negotiations about the BAP. For the Park project, this was not sufficiently specified at the outset and was eventually resolved via the production of Annual Monitoring Reports which tracked progress against the targets in the BAP through to legacy.

Ensuring that there was sufficient flexibility allowed in terms of changes to the habitat types was essential, as this allowed for changes to individual habitats as a result of design development. This approach is particularly helpful for long-term redevelopment projects where change is likely.

Project

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