



UNLOCKING ***FUTURE*** CODES

Peter Wilder, of MacFarlane Wilder, designers of Phase 1 of the BRE Innovation Park landscape, lays out a roadmap for landscape-led regeneration and the future of things to come

“THE DESIGN FOR MANUFACTURE COMPETITION WAS MEANT TO REVOLUTIONISE THE WAY THAT HOMES OF THE FUTURE WOULD BE BUILT. IN REALITY, IT REVOLUTIONISED THE WAY THAT HOMES WOULD INTERACT WITH THE LANDSCAPE AROUND THEM”



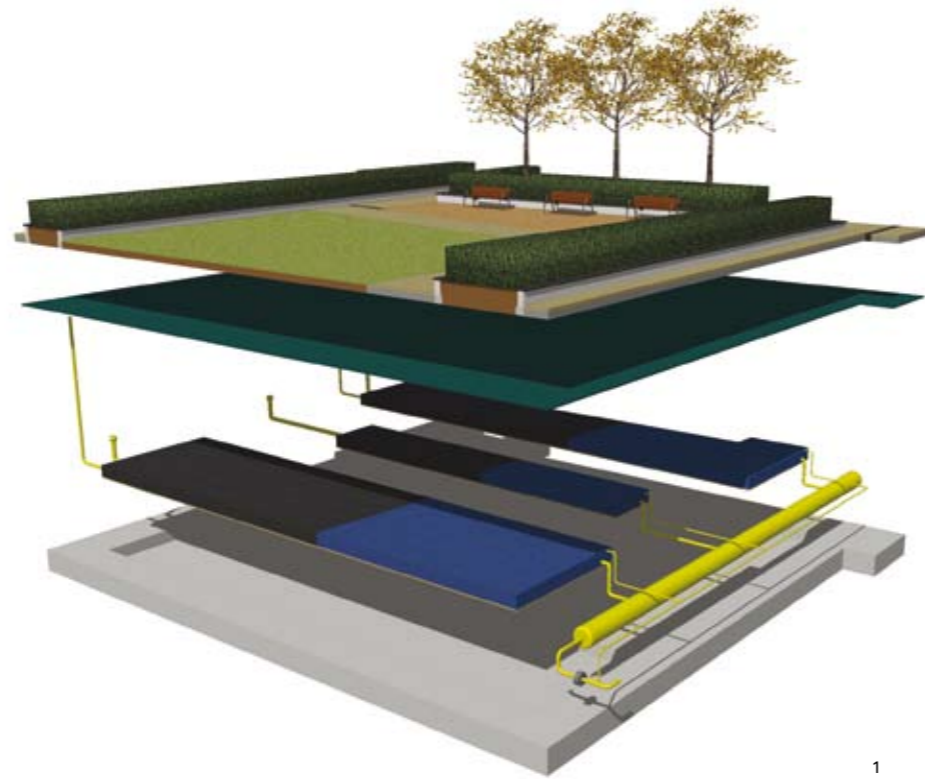
THERE WAS A TIME, NOT SO LONG AGO, WHEN landscape was merely a canvas within which to place great architecture. This is not surprising given the background of our industry, which has often been preoccupied with aesthetics while the mechanics of land and water were being carried out by engineers. Landscape architects, it seems, like the places that they create, take a long time to evolve. The past five years, however, have seen a reversal in the fortunes of landscape architects willing to take on the role of delivering sustainably-led regeneration.

Having a seat at the decision-making table requires one to learn the language of those who sit around it. Traditionally, that has meant understanding added value, planning gain and whole-life costs. Emerging guidelines on SuDS principles and the use of passive technology, however, have placed landscape at the forefront of delivery on most large-scale development sites. Brownfield regeneration often involves dealing with contamination, topsoil manufacture, site hydrology, terrain modelling, habitat protection, loss mitigation and a whole host of integrated green solutions, even at the planning stage. It is little wonder that landscape practices have gravitated towards large engineering firms. But these are exciting times for the smaller practices who are dispelling the myths of infrastructure-led solutions.

Since its introduction in 1990, the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) has had many flavours. Starting off initially as an assessment tool for commercial and residential buildings, it has quickly expanded to cover health, education and other building types. The BREEAM Ecohomes system, along the lines of the German Passivhaus system, was introduced in 2000 and was still the current methodology when John Prescott famously announced plans to launch a competition to build a £60,000 highly sustainable home using offsite construction technology.

The Design for Manufacture Competition in 2005 was meant to revolutionise the way that homes of the future would be built. In reality, it revolutionised the way that homes would interact with the landscape around them. In 2007, the SIXTYK Consortia, comprising Crest Nicholson, Kingspan, Sheppard Robson, MacFarlane Wilder and Davis Langdon, won the last site of the competition, the prestigious Rowan Road site in Merton. Of all of the sites in the competition, this one most embodied the true challenge of delivering sustainable homes in the future. Nestled in between traditional urban housing stock and a cemetery, the scheme had to demonstrate a transition from /...

BRE Scotland
 MacFarlane Wilder has been appointed as masterplanner for the two-acre BRE Innovation Park in Scotland, which is due for construction in 2010 on the former Ravensraig steelworks site near Motherwell. This will coincide with the launch of the BRE Code for Sustainable Homes Scotland. In April MacFarlane Wilder became the first landscape architecture practice to join the UK Green Building Council.
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1

high-density to low-density housing and accommodate refurbishment of an 18th century school building, a primary care facility, community hall and 2.6ha of public open space. Having developed the building as far as possible and having won two previous sites, the team now turned to the landscape architecture to provide them with the winning edge. The scheme made good use of the 2.6ha of open space by providing a stormwater wetland, reed bed filtration system, flood alleviation basin and seven different habitat zones, all within a matrix of informal parkland and play zones. The integration of green infrastructure combined with biomass CHP and rainwater harvesting enabled the scheme to achieve a zero-carbon rating, surpassing the brief and many of the competition's contemporaries.

In 2007, on the eve of the Code for Sustainable Homes, the same team re-united for Offsite 2007 at the BRE in Watford. The objective was to design and build the UK's first Code for Sustainable Homes (CfSH) Level 6 zero-carbon building. Until that point, the BRE Innovation Park at Watford had been a display area for building technology, but that was about to change. The CfSH, ushered in by the BRE in April 2007, took the first steps to integrating landscape and environmental improvements into the accreditation for sustainable homes. Unlike BREEAM, it would measure the improvement in ecological value based on a pre-development assessment and measure sustainable drainage requirements against flood risk. Water became a mandatory category and issues such as potable water use were hugely influential on rainwater and greywater harvesting. To achieve the credits required for a Code Level 6 building, it was going to be necessary to provide considerable landscape improvements around the building. Many of the improvements necessary were global issues, such as water attenuation, biodiversity and sense of place.

The Innovation Park at Watford was like no other scheme that we had ever done. Fraught with programming and access problems, littered with live and redundant service infrastructure and co-ordinating between seven different construction teams, we managed to squeeze in 95 native plant species, a swale and attenuation pond and a rainwater harvesting system. But the true success of the Innovation Park is the quantity of landscape-led innovation that has been

showcased there. The scheme uses the first UK-designed and built vortex flow control, UK-grown hardwood timbers, the first porous attenuation heat pump and, of course, the first landscape to be assessed under the CfSH, which has helped two buildings, the Kingspan Lighthouse and the Barrett Greenhouse, achieve Code Level 6.

In 2008, Macfarlane Wilder drew up proposals for an extension to the park to address some of the criticisms that it did not deal with wider issues surrounding housing such as homezones, parking, lighting and alternative building styles that were not MMC (modern methods of construction). The Phase 2 plan incorporated an existing road into a homezone, and created three new building plots to demonstrate new building methodologies. The Macfarlane Wilder Phase 2 brief became the subject of the competition won by PRP Landscape and implemented for Insite09. Four new houses that showcase alternative technologies have been built and set into a landscape that provides green facades and alternative porous paving systems.

Landscape is now an important part of the education and health sector. With the Government about to launch its £2.9bn NHS Procure 21 Plus framework for healthcare, there is much to play for in the delivery of green infrastructure as part of overall landscape strategy. New evidence by Dr William Bird, health adviser to Natural England, suggests that access to natural spaces can improve patient recovery times and reduce the incidence of depression and mental disorders in an increasingly stressed and urban population.

The opportunity to integrate water into places for play and education teaches our children an important lesson in the value of natural resources that we have come to treat as expendable commodities. Perhaps one of the greatest tests for this landscape renaissance will be in the delivery of large-scale, urban regeneration such as the Olympic Park and the Athletes Village in Stratford. If green infrastructure is used to provide flood buffering, rainwater management, productive landscapes and biodiversity within an intensely used site, then it will be a step forward for our society and for our industry. It would be an irony that on the route of Bazalgette's famous Interceptor Sewer, a process of dismantling the machinery of our industrial legacy was commenced. ■

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