

Summary of Richard Benyon Blue Green Presentation: 18th July 2013

BLUE GREEN LONDON – A WORLD-LEADING VISION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FULLY INTEGRATED WATER AND VEGETATED SYSTEMS IN AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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The current position is one of large amounts of misinformation and lack of debate on the best value way forward for London with respect to its fully integrated management and development of water and vegetated systems (Blue Green). This environment with the addition of private industry commercial drivers has led to poor and outdated decision making which doesn't take into account current best technical knowledge. Perceived barriers relating to political and policy frameworks, amongst others, have been overcome elsewhere demonstrated by successful global applications.

Three examples of misinformation were demonstrated ("exploding the myths") although there are many other examples that altogether generate enough uncertainty to warrant a rethink to current "grey only" infrastructure plans. There is a need for a Blue Green feasibility study, part of a holistic blue / green / grey solution for London, as all studies to date have been moulded towards the grey approach (£242m on Thames Tideway Tunnel studies, £15k on alternatives).

The first was that "this can't be done in London". An example was given where a progressive group of water department visionaries steered the city of Philadelphia, that has far greater challenges than London, from a large tunnel solution to a green (Blue Green in UK) infrastructure approach to dealing with combined sewer overflows (one element of Blue Green) [1].

The second related to a commonly quoted position that London Clay was a barrier to the adoption of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS). A British Geological survey map shows a wide variety of soil types [2]. There is also misunderstanding that infiltration is the only mechanism for dealing with stormwater as attenuation (slowing down of the flows), amongst others, provides protection against flood and pollution risk.

The final "myth" related to the costs and benefits of SuDS as comprehensive studies for London have not been completed. The definition of SuDS has been expanded incorporating more and more integrated design features through the water-focused industry-leading Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) [3] and then the even wider focused Blue Green (Dream) - research-based multifunctional solutions giving multifaceted benefits, e.g. urban heat island [4].

Taking one element of potential benefit, employment, it has already been demonstrated in Philadelphia that their approach to stormwater management has generated an industry that, if developed as a Blue Green industry, might lead to over 100,000 jobs in London which would be mostly low-skilled and local (to be proven by appropriate study) [5].

The future is bright if we use industry, academia and our institutions, e.g. the proposed Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers' "Adapting our Cities" initiative, to drive a change in direction leading to a large step change in application as demonstrated successfully in other parts of the world. London could lead the world in application and export services.

References:

1. <http://www.bluegreenuk.com/news.html> then “Guardian article response”
2. http://www.bluegreenuk.com/science_technology/sat04.html
3. <http://www.bluegreenuk.com/gro.html> then “GR007”
4. <http://bgd.org.uk>
5. http://www.bluegreenuk.com/society_economics_environment/see02.html