

Questions for Peter Head Interview, Friday 13 Nov 12 noon

What can urban design learn from the past?

- Look at cities that have consistently been voted as the 'most liveable ones' and how important green infrastructure is in them-Vancouver for example.

What three things should the top 100 cities do to reduce their carbon footprint?

1. Retrofit all buildings to improve energy efficiency
2. Put in energy from waste plants
3. Invest in more low carbon public transport/walking and cycling and limit car use.

All will generate jobs and promote economic development.

What is the best way to deal with these challenges – e.g. Government/top down, private sector, or community/grass roots?

- National government incentives, public private and community partnership models and community empowerment through social networking and celebrating local endeavours.

In a world of cities how do you connect people with the natural environment?

- By making it easily accessible and then teaching young people how important it is for health, climate change resilience and happiness.

Are we witnessing a return to a city state?

- I think we are rediscovering that city governance is a key leadership element in making big changes happen of the kind we need to make living on the planet more sustainable. However it cannot succeed without private sector, national government, NGO and community engagement.

How can we ensure that community participation is part of the process in moving to a low carbon future?

- By starting with social networking and the celebration of positive changes driven by communities. Also by reaching children at school and helping them to understand the issues. Most of all by drawing on the cultural roots of our diverse society to engage sustainability philosophies which are there.

How far are we from an attitudinal change that will finally see green infrastructure achieving parity with other infrastructure in the minds of all planners, developers and architects?

- Quite a long way from designing built environment around trees and water rather than the other way around. However progress is accelerating with leadership from cities like Singapore.

There are some great examples of sustainable developments – including innovative, zero carbon building design and high quality green infrastructure. Are there any examples you know that can illustrate these attributes ?

- Singapore is the shining example where biodiversity is actually managed by the National Parks organisation and they are working to create a biodiversity index for cities. They understand the links with economy and health.

How do we get these to become the norm rather than the exception?

- Through the measurement and dissemination of the real benefits in terms of reducing health costs and water management costs, building energy use reductions, food production potential and overall economic development through all of these and land values.

What do developers and architects consider to be the main “enablers and barriers” to designing good quality green infrastructure into development schemes?

- I think enablers are the adjacent land values and demand for green living and working. I think barriers are the long term maintenance costs and who pays, the structural issues of tree roots and a general lack of awareness of water management opportunities because of water companies’ focus on hard assets.

Is the consultancy sector registering, through the commissions it is receiving, a growing awareness of the need for green infrastructure to be integral to development schemes?

- There is a slow increase in demand for green infrastructure as opposed to landscape design. We are seeing this accelerating in the last 6 months.

What is the one thing that government could do now to firmly establish green infrastructure at the centre of spatial planning and development control ?

- To emphasise the benefits of green infrastructure as a key element in the transition to a low carbon future and to implement it through large retrofitting programmes.

With the Natural Development Project engaging with the development sector for new developments we also need to find ways to retrofit Green Infrastructure into existing places, what is the best way to do this and can you give some illustrations?

- When we build new low carbon developments we should incorporate retrofitting of surrounding areas through special purpose vehicles in which water, energy, waste, accessibility and green infrastructure are all included at commercially viable scale, with improved place making. Freiburg in Germany is doing this successfully.

And finally, if you had a magic wand what one thing would you invent to tackle future problems?

Fully commercial algae carbon capture at emissions sources which produces compost for increased food production inside and outside cities as well as supporting greater biodiversity- putting carbon back into our soils.