



High value housing:

Integrating trees into a high value housing development



Canonbury Park, Islington, London

High quality landscape and mature trees confer a premium on housing developments

Introduction

Developers marketing high value properties have always recognised that high quality landscaping and mature tree planting confer a premium on the development which is reflected in sale prices not just at the initial point of sale but at subsequent transactions as well, thereby making properties attractive to future purchasers. This effect of a mature or maturing landscape improving property values is one that could be harnessed to achieve better returns for the developer and the subsequent property owner at a time when property values are less stable than in recent times.

A quick survey of London finds that the most desirable and valuable areas of the capital in property terms are also the most treed. This positive approach would also contribute to improving the development's environmental impact by recognising that the built environment should accommodate large species tree planting so as to confer option or future value as well as true climate adaptation resilience for the future

Background

The site in Canonbury Park South N1 was the old site of the Metropolitan police Service's Olive Section Houses. This Police Service accommodation was deemed to be surplus to requirements and scheduled for disposal in early 1994. The site was purchased by a developer specialising in high quality residential properties.

Due to the effectiveness of pre-application meetings and discussions together with a genuine commitment by the developer to achieve a high quality landscape a variety of innovative and cost effective amendments were made in terms of the detailed construction of the development. These physical amendments allowed better protection for the existing trees on the site, but also permitted the planting of large species trees that were necessary to retain the character of the area in the longer term

Objectives

- To provide high quality, high value residential housing
- To retain key structural trees both on and adjacent to the site
- To accommodate future generations of large species trees on and adjacent to the site
- To provide contextual new tree planting that complements and reinforces existing species characteristics
- To engage the local community in the protection of their green infrastructure.
- To demonstrate added value of tree retention and supplementary planting to the developer
- To implement local authority tree protection policies and planning conditions fully

Actions

- Pre-application meeting between developer and local authority
- Robust interpretation of tree retention policies
- Engagement of community through local resident's and historical societies
- Supportive engagement by planning committee members
- Pre-application site visit between tree officer and developer to demarcate tree protection zones
- Building footprint agreed in principle prior to planning application
- Foundation design (raft & pile and beam) agreed in principle prior to planning application
- Replacement tree species agreed in principle prior to planning application
- Regular on site supervision of tree protection measures during construction phase

Achievements

- Retention of prominent large species structural trees on site
- Construction of building foundations able to accommodate 2nd generation large species tree planting if retained trees are removed during lifetime of building
- Amendment of vehicle access ramps to lower level garages to protect root zones of established trees
- Significant contribution to the principles of climate adaptation through urban greening
- New tree planting in communal areas providing shade and amenity for residents
- Design of walls and planters amended to accommodate newly planted large species trees
- Visual amenity and character of wider area secured for future generation of residents
- Effective communications, increased knowledge base and trust building between all participants that rolled over into subsequent projects

Lessons Learnt

- Engagement on tree issues must be undertaken at the earliest opportunity e.g. the conceptual and design stages
- Expert arboricultural advice should be obtained at these stages of the scheme as well as during development and implementation
- Set down clear markers on which trees should be retained from the outset
- Establish effective communications between partners
- Construction phase site supervision inspections by the tree officer are essential