

Nic Durston

Wandle Valley Regional Park

Indeed. I have no presentation; I will just be talking. Some of you will have seen on your programme perhaps before today that Sue Morgan, the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust's Chief Executive was due to talk today but unfortunately she is very ill and is also finishing off our bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which I will come back to. Therefore, as Chair, I have agreed to stand in at the last minute but, do not worry, I hopefully know what I am talking about. I have worked for the National Trust and my current day job, so to speak, is Chief Executive running Southbank Employers' Group and Southbank Business Improvement District, which geographically is about as far off from the green belt in London as you can be, but, nevertheless, there are still lots of relevant themes.

I want to talk about the Wandle Valley Regional Park but also the Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust. The Wandle Valley, the River Wandle is a Thames tributary, 16-mile chalk river, incredibly important in terms of ecology and biodiversity, rises in the Surrey Hills, runs through Croydon, Merton, Sutton and empties in the Thames at Wandsworth. It is rich in biodiversity, as I have said, but it is also a river which has chartered London's history over 200 to 300 years. It has followed the rise of industrial London and urbanising London. It was once known as Europe's hardest working river due to the number of mills that were created along its length. It is a regional park in that it has regional park status in the All London Green Grid (ALGG) and it is actually contained as area eight within the ALGG. Obviously, the theme of today is the green belt but my thesis is really we need to look at what is happening in London and what the opportunities are in London around green infrastructure and potential for green infrastructure as part of the consideration of the future of the green belt. Those of you who have read Raymond Williams' book *The Country and The City* will understand that these are not two different concepts. They are very deep notions that are linked in terms of politics, culture and in terms of an economy as well.

The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust was set up as the sub-regional partnership to give leadership to that regional park aspiration. As a charity and a company limited by guarantee, it brings together four London boroughs, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the National Trust and a number of community organisations and community networks to ensure that there is that holistic view as to what this hugely important sub-regional area can deliver. However, we deliver that with one part time person - Sue [Morgan] works two days a week - and we get fantastic support from those board members and also the likes of the GLA who have consistently supported the work that we do. I think what the GLA see is that within a sub-regional partnership there is the true opportunity and the mechanism to deliver lots of those benefits that we all know green infrastructure can do. I absolutely agree with everything that Dieter [Helm] said, certainly agree with everything that Mathew [Frith] said and also that Noel [Farrer] said. What runs through all of those presentations is the recognition of what green infrastructure can deliver.

Hopefully you have a little summary of our strategy in your pack. If not, I think there are more at the back. What I recommend is that you use this and just follow it to look at the fuller

version because that sets out a number of key themes and aspirations as to what the Wandle Valley can deliver for London and for Londoners. It takes the fundamental context of growth. It accepts growth as inevitable, given the population projections, but it actually presents what we believe is a genuine workable way of delivering at a sub-regional level all the benefits the green infrastructures can deliver. Therefore, many of the themes that have been touched on today I hope are reflected in our strategy as to what the Wandle Valley Regional Park can deliver.

We talk about landscape, we talk about heritage and culture, we do talk about health and wellbeing. One of the projects which we run is a programme called 'Get Active Wandle Valley'. It is actually supported by the four boroughs and the National Trust and I think a real relevance is that the funding from the boroughs towards 'Get Active Wandle Valley' does not come from parks. It comes from the public health budget that those boroughs have. That is the recognition of what a really good quality regional park can deliver in terms of health and wellbeing. I certainly echo your point, Barbara [Young], in terms of being able to talk to lottery distributors around how they can work to fund the initiatives around the green space agenda that delivers to a much wider ambition.

We also talk about natural systems and resilience, therefore, yes, climate change, but also some of those other issues that Mathew [Frith] touched on in terms of the need to deal with flooding, to be able to deal with sustainable urban drainage mechanisms. Crucially, we also talk about people and communities. I think it is a really interesting debate that, if we had more time, we should spend more time on in terms of what is the experience of people who are living in perhaps dense areas with very, very limited access to good quality green space. That is both a challenge that Noel [Farrer] has referred to in terms of how do you improve the quality of those spaces, but also something that both he and Mathew [Frith] have touched on in terms of how do you involve people in that process. Certainly through volunteering, through advocacy, but also through very practical projects like getting involved in sports and in recreation. These are everything that a good quality network can deliver for London and for Londoners.

Finally, we also talk about economic growth. We accept that there is that context as London's economy grows, but it is also about the opportunity, it is also about being able to deliver new technologies - whether it be food growing or whether it would be some of the new industries around tech and digital. A good quality urban environment within London is a huge attraction for inward investors looking to base business and to put investment decisions. The Wandle is already home to 10% of London's manufacturing base. We think that economic growth and economic success goes hand in hand with good quality management of green space and biodiversity and all the other benefits which we can deliver. I think the big challenge though is how do you resource and how do you put what is necessary to ensure that a sub-regional partnership like ours, but also others that exist around London, can actually realise the vision that we have through the ALGG. It is only by doing that that I think you can begin to answer some of the questions around what the relationship to London should be with the green belt. Thank you very much.