Profitable Places

Why housebuilders invest in landscape

Landscape Institute
Inspiring great places

A recent report from property agent Savills has shown how investment in the public realm can potentially double average values of flats in parts of London. This is nothing new. In the mid-19th century, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted justified New York's Central Park by noting that the increase in the value of adjacent property would produce enough in taxes to pay for it. And the evidence continues to stack up.

15%

Developers would be willing, on average, to pay at least 3% more for land in close proximity to open space, with some putting the premium as high as 15–20%

61%

Percentage of councillors in England and Wales who identified public opposition as the most significant barrier to housing development

7%

A 1992 study showed that a view of a forest can increase house prices by 7%; a view of water can lead to an increase of 5%

82%

Percentage of councillors in England and Wales who, when asked what would make housing development more acceptable, identified greater benefits for the local community, such as schools, health services and green spaces

25 per cent

Capital costs of traditional drainage are more than double the capital costs of soft, green, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), and annual maintenance costs are also 20–25% cheaper. Over a 60-year lifespan, SuDS are around half the cost of traditional drainage solutions

34 per cent

In 2005, CABE Space found that property values in England went up by as much as 34% (with a typical increase of 5–7%) for properties that had park views and were near parks

Sources: *The value of placemaking*, Savills, 2013; *Green Infrastructure's contribution to economic growth: a review*, Defra and Natural England, 2013; *New Housing Developments Survey*, Local Government Association, 2010; *Does money grow on trees?* CABE Space, 2005; *Microeconomic Evidence for the Benefits of Investment in the Environment*, Natural England, 2012

Lead with the landscape

Over many years, I have learnt that the spaces between buildings are just as important as the buildings themselves.

The best housebuilders and developers lead with the landscape, then consider the built fabric. The landscape is an essential part of what makes a place successful. It sets the scene and is there to be enjoyed by all.

I know from experience that beautiful, robust public space delivers a better quality of life for residents. It creates a sense of place. It generates more value. Most importantly, it helps to create a sense of pride and ownership.

Places such as Saffron Square in Croydon and Woodberry Down in Hackney illustrate how landscape design can transform a site with relatively modest levels of investment. It is about attention to detail, both in terms of the materials chosen and in considering how a space might be used. Similarly, the Hamptons at Worcester Park in Surrey, originally built by St James on an old sewage-treatment works, now has 30 acres of parkland and three lakes at the heart of a brand-new neighbourhood. And this is not just about place making; it is about place keeping, too. Responsible developers need to create spaces that are easy and inexpensive to maintain.

That is the real power of landscape design. It helps to create a place and a community – encouraging people to meet and congregate, not simply to use a space as a thoroughfare.

The landscape architecture profession has a unique ability to generate more value for all of your stakeholders and change the way that people see new housing – but it needs to be involved from the very start.

This publication showcases five housing case studies where the landscape has informed the location, layout and design of new developments to great effect. I hope it will inspire anyone in the business of creating new homes and communities to lead with the landscape.

Tony Pidgley CBE
Chairman, The Berkeley Group

In order to create the kind of high-quality places we all want, a major cultural change is needed where the focus of everyone involved moves towards the wider context of what is already there and its all-important setting and context. Landscape is the primary infrastructure and ordinary buildings are the ones that deserve more attention.

Sir Terry Farrell

Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment, 2014

The need for new housing has never been greater

We have been designing landscapes as part of private and public housing developments for many years. We believe that a close relationship between housebuilders and the creation of meaningful landscapes has resulted in landmark housing developments.

Think of Jekyll at Munstead Wood, Unwin at Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb, Cunningham's Span estates, Youngman and Higson at Milton Keynes, Erskine at Greenwich Millennium Village, and, today, Grant Associates at Accordia in Cambridge. In each case, the subtle yet persuasive combination of good-quality housing in verdant, well-designed and constructed landscapes has created housing developments that endure as successful, popular and valuable places.

These were formative projects for many of us in deciding to make housing the primary focus of our landscape practices.

Now, the need for new housing has never been greater. But people want to live in desirable housing – not just any housing. The success of the projects in this guide demonstrate that. But this is not always the case. Existing residents in cities, towns and villages need to believe that new housing will enhance, not diminish, their quality of life and the value of their homes.

There is an increasing acknowledgement among housebuilders, in government, and in a growing number of studies, that developing housing with a sense of place delivers benefits for all concerned – from residents to investors. This guide is aimed at advising housebuilders on the role that landscape professionals can play in helping them to achieve their business goals.

Landscape thinking delivers good places – and good places are profitable places for all.

Noel Farrer
President, Landscape Institute, and Director, Farrer Huxley Associates

James Lord
Chair, Landscape Institute Policy Committee Working Group on Housing, and Head of Landscape Design, HTA

Adding value

Five ways in which landscape professionals can add value

Housing is high on the political agenda. Population projections show that we need 230,000 new homes each year. However, in 2011/12 only 128,160 new homes were built, while affordable housing saw a 68% fall compared with the previous year. With the government putting pressure on housebuilders to build more homes than at any time since the post-war building boom, and with confidence growing in the property market, the scene is set to create the sustainable communities we need in the future. A landscape-led approach can help housebuilders to seize the opportunity. Here's how.

1

Investment in a high-quality landscape pays dividends, as customers are willing to pay more for it

Good-quality landscape is highly cost effective. It is a relatively low-cost part of any development scheme and pays dividends in added sales values, increased rates of sales and positive customer perceptions. The most popular developments are frequently the greenest, leafiest ones, with mature trees, well-designed streets and open spaces. Leading housing developers use good-quality landscape design to set themselves apart from their competitors because it provides their developments with a distinct sense of place. And this landscape goes on to feature prominently in their marketing materials.

For me, to make good new developments great places to live, they should be built around the natural features that exist in an area. Historic buildings, open space, trees, existing plants and especially natural water features should all be used to maximum effect. Where these don't exist on a site, to the extent that it is possible they should be created. Even in very dense environments such as central London it is possible to create great places to live with effective landscape solutions. One thing that is clear is that creating great places also delivers better returns for the owners of our business.

Mark Clare

Group Chief Executive, Barratt Developments plc

2

Good landscape planning helps to make the best use of land, identifying the most sustainable sites for development

Landscape and environmental assessments help to identify the best sites for development, enabling housebuilders to make the case to planning authorities that development will be environmentally sustainable and appropriate to the landscape. Understanding the landscape, from the underlying geology and landform to existing vegetation, will help in locating the best development plots within a site and maximising the space for development within environmental limits.

We have always been totally committed to creating developments with a real sense of place and community. Top-quality landscape and public realm are vital to ensure these objectives as well as to give new developments an immediate sense of maturity. Landscape, even if it involves the planting of large mature trees, is a very cost-effective way of creating character and variety, which are so key in creating places where people can enjoy living and working. Countryside's approach to prioritising landscape applies across the board, whether it's regenerating worn-out social housing estates in urban areas, such as our project at Acton Gardens in Ealing, or creating brand new communities such as that at Great Kneighton in Cambridge.

Richard Cherry
Deputy Chairman, Countryside Properties plc

3

Well-planned and well-designed green infrastructure creates spaces that deliver more efficient land use

Green infrastructure refers to the network of natural features such as green spaces, street trees and waterways that are found within and between villages, towns and cities. It is a service-providing infrastructure like any other, but unlike traditional 'grey' infrastructure, can be planned and designed so as to deliver multiple benefits simultaneously. Green infrastructure is capable of delivering natural drainage, cleaner air and urban cooling, while also providing public amenity space, for example. Because of this flexibility and adaptability, it often represents a more efficient use of land and delivers better value for money than infrastructure that requires expensive technology and is difficult to maintain.

At the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) we work with development partners from the housing and regeneration sector that share our commitment to building well-designed, high-quality, sustainable communities. The HCA invests in developing large and often complex sites, and this requires knowledge and appreciation of the existing site character and the long-term needs of a local community. Robust and imaginatively designed landscape infrastructure adds value to our projects. It helps create a place that residents can enjoy, improves biodiversity and can improve investment returns to public and private sector partners.

Louise Wyman
Midlands Large Sites Lead, Homes and Communities Agency

4

Landscape is a cost-effective way to meet the regulations and standards that guide sustainable development, such as *Building for Life 12*

Sustainable development is a national planning requirement, and a landscape-led approach can help achieve it. The public realm of any housing development creates the social 'glue' that makes a place work. Of the 12 national standards under *Building for Life 12*, 11 require a landscape-led approach to achieve a green light. A well-designed network of streets, public spaces and community facilities, for example, creates a successful and healthy community. In addition, green infrastructure, as with any other type of infrastructure, depends upon regular maintenance to maximise the benefits. Creating a long-term management plan in tandem with the landscape-design phase and involving residents directly in the management can be a cost-effective solution.

Sustainable housing development is about more than just energy-efficient homes and green travel plans. At Crest, we have learnt that to create places where people wish to live, and to add value for the new community, our shareholders and wider society alike, we should always invest in the public realm and the natural environment from the outset. For example, at Oakgrove Village in Milton Keynes, we have introduced new public squares, mature tree-lined avenues and ecology corridors as an integral part of the initial phase of development. Sales rates and values have been exceptional. Indeed, Crest always plans in ecology, landscape and green infrastructure from the very beginning of our developments, and never fails to reap the dividends as we strive to create sustainable new communities.

Chris Tinker
Board Director and Regeneration Chairman, Crest Nicholson

5

Considering landscape from the outset can ensure that new development is more acceptable to existing communities, and will speed up the planning process

The Housing Strategy for England (2011) suggests that housing developments often fail to progress because of opposition from local communities. Ensuring that new housing is sensitively sited in relation to the existing landscape, and enhances rather than detracts from the character of the local landscape, will be key to gaining communities' support. By involving a landscape professional early in the process, development can be shown to enhance local areas through, for example, improved or new public spaces, walking and cycling routes and increased tree planting. Focusing on making a positive contribution to the whole neighbourhood as part of new housing development, showing that the works deliver real gains for the existing community and demonstrating that the new housing will therefore lead to increased house prices for all can smooth the planning process and help to overcome any objections.

The setting for new homes is as important as the homes themselves. Prioritising and focusing on the detail of landscape, planting, layout and design are integral to making great places to live. Successful design can be seen across London, from major new developments at Barking Riverside, to Cane Hill, to smaller in-fill sites in inner London, or estate regeneration from the Aylesbury to Kidbrooke. The sense of arrival at a special place that can come from a well-thought-out, sensitive and beautiful landscape is fundamental to ensuring that new housing, especially at scale, is a good thing that enriches our neighbourhoods.

Richard Blakeway
Deputy Mayor of London

1

An innovative, sustainable approach to landscape can create a unique place that improves people's quality of life

Accordia, Cambridge

Developer: Countryside Properties
Landscape architect: Grant Associates
Accommodation: 378 homes
Tenure: Mixed (30% affordable)
Completion date: 2011

Accordia incorporates around three times the amount of green space of other housing developments in the area.

1

2

3

01
Brooklands Avenue, a forest garden
Grant Associates

02
Central lawn, where the community meets for cricket and events
Fielden Clegg Bradley Studio

03
Garden street with espalier pear trees
Grant Associates

04
Terraces along the central tree belt with incidental cycle storage
Grant Associates

05
Accordia illustrative masterplan – a series of interconnected garden rooms
Grant Associates

In 2008, Accordia became the first residential scheme to receive the RIBA Stirling Prize. Developed on the site of former government offices, with more than 700 existing mature trees and adjoining a conservation area, it was essential that the masterplan for Accordia responded to the landscape. An innovative technical and design approach to the scheme enabled the developer to fully exploit the opportunities of this mature landscape; Accordia incorporates around three times the amount of green space of other housing developments in the area.

The framework for the masterplan, designed by Grant Associates in collaboration with architects FCBS, was themed around the concept of 'living in a garden'. It included productive gardens with fruit trees, herbs and berries, and formal lawns, reedbeds and meadows, with new green spaces between the mews courts, greens and squares. Each home was designed to overlook one of these green spaces and each space is linked to the next by a network of footpaths and cycleways, pedestrian-friendly streets and subtle traffic-calming measures that create a safe, 20mph zone.

The sustainability of the development was integral to the masterplan, which incorporated a series of landscape strategies such as SuDS, enhancements to the microclimate and biodiversity and productive planting regimes. Low-maintenance green sedum roofs have been used on apartment buildings, providing a habitat for wildlife, aiding water attenuation and acting as an excellent insulator.

Creating a community asset

At the core of what makes Accordia special are the places to walk, meet, greet and play with friends, family and neighbours. It is a community landscape whose design has enabled people, and especially children, to thrive. They have commandeered the streets and mews that are normally dominated by vehicles.

2

A landscape-led approach to development can help to secure planning consent even on sensitive greenfield sites

Trumpington Meadows, South Cambridgeshire

Developer: Trumpington Meadows Land Company (Grosvenor and USS Ltd)
Landscape architect: Terence O'Rourke
Accommodation: 1,200-unit mixed-use residential community with primary school, retail, allotments, a 60-hectare riverside park and enhanced agricultural land
Tenure: Mixed
Estimated completion date: 2019

01
Northern gateway to first phase of Trumpington Meadows
Terence O'Rourke

02
Species rich meadow
Terence O'Rourke

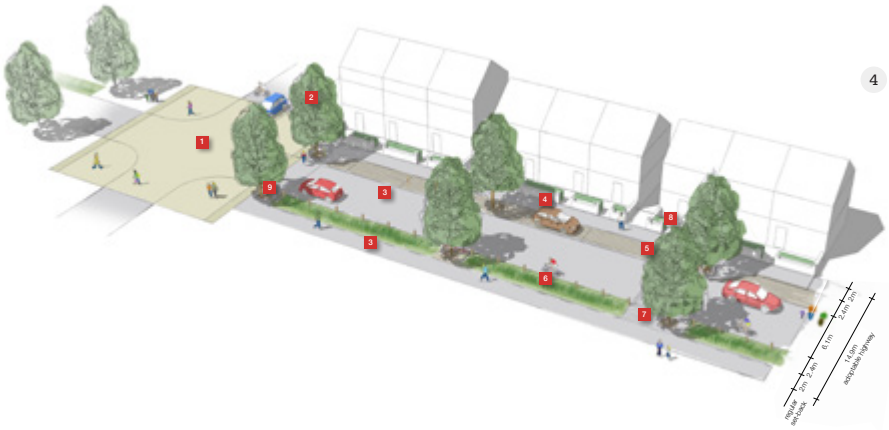
03
Community street
Terence O'Rourke

04
Primary Street diagram from Trumpington Meadows Design Code, 2010
Terence O'Rourke

2

3

The new design delivered almost twice as many homes, as well as improving the urban edge and green infrastructure framework.


4

In the early 1990s, the 'Cambridge phenomenon' required the release of green-belt land for new homes. The green belt around Cambridge had always been successful in protecting the setting of the historic city and checking unrestricted sprawl.

For developer Trumpington Meadows Land Company, these two factors meant that housing-site allocations in local plans could only be secured if it was able to demonstrate that the development could be delivered without compromising the purpose of the green belt. A collaboration with planners, masterplanners and landscape architects Terence O'Rourke provided the solution.

Original plans for the development were reconfigured both in form and size following a landscape analysis of the site. Compared with the original allocation in the local plan, the new design delivered almost twice as many homes, as well as improving the urban edge and green infrastructure framework. It also allowed housing to be located with improved access to the transport hub at the centre of the scheme.

The developer also made the bold decision to invest in the early delivery of primary infrastructure, including a country park, streets and enhanced agricultural land. This meant that when the sale of the first housing parcel was completed, the implementation of important landscape spaces was already under way.

The early delivery of the country park, for example, has given the Wildlife Trust several years to nurture the area before it becomes accessible to the public in 2015. This has ensured that a species-rich meadow, native hedgerow planting, wetland areas and the large parkland trees have been established, and these are all likely to increase the value of housing parcels next to the country park when they go on the market.

Increasing property prices

According to property agent Savills, the early delivery and quality of the landscape has increased both house prices and the rate of sales on the development. In particular, land parcels with frontage onto the country park are anticipated to see considerably raised values. The amount of additional value varied according to house type, but, overall, Savills estimates that an average increase of about 10% has been achieved. The first housing parcel was sold to Barratt Homes in 2011, and construction started in 2012.

3

Even in high-density urban developments, intelligent landscape design can maximise property values by creating an attractive place for the community

Saffron Square, Croydon

Developer: Berkeley Homes
Landscape architect: HTA Design
Accommodation: 791 units, private sale and shared ownership
Tenure: Mixed
Estimated completion date: Phase 1 due for completion September 2014; final completion August 2017

1

2

The landscape forms a key part of the sales journey and therefore delivering high-quality open space in the first phase has been critical in the sales process.

01
Saffron Square, the public square after which the development is named
Berkeley Homes, HTA Design, Rolfe Judd

02
Aerial CGI showing public square and communal roof gardens
Berkeley Homes, HTA Design, Rolfe Judd

03
Water is used to animate the public square, enhancing light and sense of space
Berkeley Homes, HTA Design, Rolfe Judd

In the heart of Croydon, on a site of less than one hectare, is a mixed-use development of 791 new homes. This is Saffron Square. A brownfield regeneration site under development by Berkeley Homes, it comprises a landmark 45-storey residential tower alongside apartment blocks with extensive roof gardens and terraces, and ground-floor commercial units – all centred on the new public square that gives it its name.

HTA Design worked closely with architects Rolfe Judd to develop the public realm and facilitate movement through the site, connecting it with the wider urban area to create coherent design at street and roof level.

At the western entrance, the building layout retains generous views of Wellesley Road, while reducing the impact of the road on the inner space. The new civic square provides an attractive pedestrian route and encourages people to pause and enjoy the playful water features, vibrant planting and seating at its centre. A range of areas, at differing scales, offer informal and formal places for recreation, outdoor dining and picnics, and relate to the cafés and shops on the ground floor.

The roofscape is equally diverse. Biodiverse private and communal gardens for residents also provide ecological benefit in the city. Informal play areas have been carefully integrated into attractive roof gardens to meet the Greater London Authority's play-space requirements. Communal terraces have a range of spaces, with facilities such as planting, seating areas and green roofs.

Adding capital value

Saffron Square demonstrates how providing generous, well-planted, mature gardens and sky gardens can add capital value to the developer.

First, providing extensive amenities at roof level allows a significantly higher plot ratio than would normally be possible with a conventional site-planning approach. Second, incorporating water in the public realm at the entrance to the dwellings has increased sales values. Third, the landscape has created unique marketing opportunities, setting the development apart from the competition and attracting prospective customers with the vision of a home with a garden in an urban location.

According to Harry Lewis, Berkeley Homes South-East London Managing Director at Saffron Square "the landscape forms a key part of the sales journey and therefore delivering high-quality open space in the first phase has been critical in the sales process". Almost 200 apartments have been occupied to date, and the central square is now fully open for public use. The calibre of the homes and residential amenities on offer are changing people's perceptions of Croydon – from a concrete jungle to a desirable place to live.

4

High-quality street and public-realm design can be economically viable for volume housebuilders

Polnoon, Eaglesham, East Renfrewshire

Developer: Mactaggart & Mickel Homes
Landscape architect: horner + maclennan
Accommodation: 121 units
Tenure: Mixed
Completion date: 2013 (Phase 1)

1

2

3

01
Phase 1 building and landscape character
Mactaggart and Mickel

02
Play areas animate the public realm spaces
Mactaggart and Mickel

03
Hierarchy of streets, lanes and spaces – concept sketch of the entrance area
horner + maclennan

04
The tight grouping of houses creates a defined sequence of public realm spaces
Mactaggart and Mickel

Developed as an exemplar for the Scottish housebuilding industry, as part of a Scottish Government-led initiative, Polnoon was based on a concept that demonstrates how streets can become places and not just thoroughfares. The public realm is designed as shared space for both vehicles and pedestrians, with a hierarchy of streets, lanes and courts to encourage deliberately slow speeds.

Key to its successful integration of architectural, urban and landscape design features is a landscape strategy that makes the most of the available land resource. Conceived by horner + maclennan in collaboration with Proctor and Matthews Architects and Waterman Boreham Transport Planning, the strategy prioritised a sequence of open spaces with connections to the wider landscape.

This included tight groupings of buildings that responded to the historic character and grain of the Outstanding Conservation Area of Eaglesham and a clear hierarchy of interconnected streets, which allowed existing historic landscape features to be retained. Crucially, this approach provided 121 housing units as opposed to the 92 proposed by an earlier, traditional, volume-housing layout.

The development's green infrastructure also provides a range of primary and secondary benefits. These include play areas, enhanced pedestrian circulation, surface-water management, blocks of boundary planting to soften the built edge of the development and general tree and hedge planting throughout. Collectively, this enhances residential amenities and provides the development with a distinctive character.

Integrating bio-retention areas – used to treat storm-water runoff – into the street infrastructure also greatly assisted in making optimum use of the space available. Its success is regarded by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency as a major step forward in sustainable drainage design within residential developments in Scotland.

Setting an industry-wide standard

The Scottish Government publication *Polnoon Masterplan: Idea to Design* praises the Polnoon project as marking a shift in design approach by not applying the all-too-common standard solutions to housing layouts and instead concentrating on considering better solutions for street designs. The publication says: "The positive 'knock-on' effect that this has on the quality of a place is of the utmost importance to Mactaggart & Mickel Ltd, who have won numerous industry awards for the quality of their place design." Plots at Polnoon are currently selling well.

Crucially, this approach provided 121 housing units as opposed to the 92 proposed by an earlier, traditional, volume-housing layout.

5

Establishing key landscape features early in the development process can play a positive role in marketing by creating a good first impression for potential buyers

Water Colour, Redhill, Surrey

Developer: Linden Homes
Landscape architect: Studio Engleback
Accommodation: 526 units
Tenure: Mixed
Completion date: 2012

01
The canal
Studio Engleback

02
Reeds and rushes
Studio Engleback

03
Lagoon-side housing
Studio Engleback

2

3

Water Colour is a village-scale urban extension to the town of Redhill. Built on 27 hectares of brownfield land and including 6.8 hectares of open space, with footpaths, cycle trails, play areas and an extensive new wetland nature reserve, it has become Linden Homes's flagship development.

A former quarry, the site had two settlement lagoons and a seasonal stream, the Gatton Brook, which had long been culverted in an underground pipe. Designers Studio Engleback saw an opportunity to restore the lagoons to create a central 'blue spine', and to daylight the brook, skirting the housing and passing through new open space. The effect is to give residents the opportunity to encounter water at every turn.

The masterplan was devised around a series of distinct areas: streamside, canalside, reeds and rushes, and lakeside – with sustainable drainage linked to the existing stream. The site includes 7.5 acres of public open space, with a further 25 acres including the two restored lagoons, which filter and attenuate surface water and act as a buffer between town and countryside. During the planning stages, the restoration of the lagoon and the brook were important in achieving planning permission.

Standing out in the market

By creating the high-quality green/blue landscape spine before much of the surrounding housing was built, the development had a more mature landscape when the homes came onto the market – and actively links the inner part of the scheme to the countryside. To ensure that the extensive landscape across the development is maintained to a high standard, a bespoke management company has been set up, and the lagoons and their surroundings have been handed over to the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

By creating the high-quality green and blue landscape spine before much of the surrounding housing was built, the development had a more mature landscape when the homes came onto the market.

Place comes before architecture, and landscape plays a big role in place.

Wayne Hemingway MBE
Co-founder of Hemingway Design and Design Council CABE Trustee
Landscape: The Journal of the Landscape Institute, Autumn 2013

For more information on how good landscape planning and design can add value to your business, go to **www.landscapeinstitute.org**
Copies of the following publications can also be found online:

Green Infrastructure:
An integrated approach to land use
Landscape Institute, 2013
www.landscapeinstitute.org/gi

Trees in the Townscape:
A Guide for Decision Makers
Trees & Design Action Group, 2012
www.tdag.org.uk/trees-in-the-townscape

Why Invest in Landscape?
Landscape Institute, 2011
www.landscapeinstitute.org/invest

Building for Life 12
Home Builders Federation, Design for Homes
and CABE at the Design Council, 2012
www.designcouncil.org.uk/knowledge-resources/
building-life-12

Public Health and Landscape:
Creating healthy places
Landscape Institute, 2013
www.landscapeinstitute.org/health

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Image
Children playing at Accordia, Cambridge
Grant Associates

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