



SuDS Pilot: Communication and Consultation Process

The SuDS pilot project communication and consultation process began in June 2012 and has taken a twin-track approach to community engagement, undertaking a wide community education and engagement programme in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF), with a more targeted engagement of residents specifically on the shortlisted streets and final pilot streets in both LBHF and RBKC.

Consultation with officers and members of both the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) at bi-borough meetings began the communication process with discussions about the long-listed street selection. By September 2012, meetings to discuss the short-listed street selection were able to take place with Councillor Botterill, Leader of LBHF and Cabinet Member, Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler and at RBKC with Cabinet Members Councillor Ahern and Councillor Pascall. The specific ward councillors and council officers were kept informed and involved as the project progressed. Regular project meetings with both borough's flooding officers and members of the highways teams took place to discuss the practical details for implementation of the scheme in due course.

The wide community engagement and education programme in LBHF was led by London Sustainability Exchange (LSx), a charity that promotes sustainability and health and well-being issues. LSx initially researched 45 community groups with a vested interest in flooding including gardening groups, Thames rowing groups, schools, community action groups, tenants' and residents' associations and the citizens' advice bureau. Finding in-roads to the community proved challenging, with many organisations saying they were happy to support SuDS initiatives in principle but that they did not have the capacity to become actively involved in the project. LSx ultimately recruited community champions from three organisations to support the project - Phoenix High School (Phoenix), Urban Partnership Group (UPG) and Hammersmith Community Gardens Association (HCGA). The champions were trained to communicate SuDS issues to other members of the community, carrying out resident surveys and providing local observations and records of flooding. The aim of these activities was to build awareness of urban flooding issues and to encourage support for a wider roll out of retrofitted SuDS in the future.

Following evening consultation workshops in December 2012 at both town halls for residents and community representatives, a more focussed street-specific consultation exercise was carried out during 2013. An initial one-page questionnaire was sent to residents of the shortlisted streets to explain the aims of the project and get a measure for the level of awareness and enthusiasm for SuDS and willingness to participate in the pilot scheme.

The Thames Water SuDS Bus visited the selected three streets on several occasions for the whole day on Saturdays and drop-ins were also held at community venues close to the selected streets during late weekday afternoons and evenings. Attendance by the project team members at specific local meetings such as the Arundel and Elgin Garden Committee Meeting, the Askew Ward Panel meeting and the Cathnor Park Area Action Group Meeting has also taken place with the purpose of consulting and communicating to as wide an audience as possible in the area of the three streets.

What has emerged from the community engagement activities is that a core community of 10-15% of people on each road is highly supportive of the scheme and attend each engagement event but to get wider buy-in, a very direct approach is required. This has involved door-to-door visits in the evening and at weekends as well as setting up individual appointments to see residents via email and telephone calls.

Communications with residents originally began with a focus on flood risk issues but have been changed over time to focus more on landscaping and the wider benefits of the SuDS scheme. One of the most successful methods of engaging residents was the use of simple, graphically attractive postcards offering residents a water butt and permeable paving for their front garden. Feedback from residents was that they noticed this much more than other communications issued by the project team and the offer of free garden benefits had attracted them more than focusing on flood risk or streetscape issues.



Community engagement events and an example of the invitation postcards sent to residents



Engagement levels have markedly improved from the original 10% response to the questionnaire issued at the start of the project. However, there is wide variance between streets due to the different types of housing and ownership profiles. Mendora Road has had the best response as the properties are mainly occupied by a single tenant or owner. The large Georgian properties on Arundel Gardens are generally sub-divided into five apartments and it has been more difficult to engage with residents in the higher apartments who are not affected by flooding. In Melina Road there is a higher proportion of transient housing association and council tenants as well as quite a high proportion of sub-divided properties so it has also been more difficult to engage residents on this road.

During the past year there has been engagement with residents and interested parties to provide further information on the development of the project plans. Thames Water representatives accepted an invitation to attend the Cathnor Park AGM and were able to give a short presentation to inform the members of the group and local ward councillors of the project's progress.

The Thames Water SuDS Bus was used once again together with a small gazebo, at Melina Road to act as a focal point and communication base. On-street discussions about the project design took place with visitors to Cathnor Park, some of the residents of the local area and the schoolchildren, parents and teachers from the Academy and the Nursery School. The proposed rainwater gardens were marked out on the paved area and samples of plants were brought along to provide residents with an idea of the type of planting that would take place. The location of the gardens has since been slightly amended as a result of the discussions, to accommodate pedestrian flows and ease the access to the park.

Consultation and communication with the residents of all three streets is ongoing and will become more frequent and focussed as timescales for the construction of the SuDS infrastructure are put in place and specific work is planned for each road next year.