

Vision for the future

THE CONFERENCE THEME

Achieving more with less across rural and urban landscapes - our challenge today.

But, “more” of what? More natural environment? More integrated and effective management? More integrated landscapes that benefit people and nature?

And “with less”. So that points to being more effective and more efficient.

But what is the final goal? How will you know when you have arrived at your destination? Do you have a vision of what success feels like? Is your driver the outcome or the journey?

If it is the outcome, how can you be sure the journey will get you there in time? If it is the journey, have you lifted your eyes to see the horizon?

What is your destination, your vision of the future, and is it really achievable?

I want to encourage you to think about envisioning outcomes, breakthrough management techniques and the role of realistic scenario planning.

OUTCOME VISIONS

At this event last year, speakers offered their visions of the future. Paul Wilkinson – Head of Living Landscape at the Wildlife Trusts – saw a future where wildlife was no longer be seen as a luxury add-on, but an essential part of life on earth.

Securing nature’s recovery would require a paradigm shift, he said. He drew on the Lawton Review of wildlife sites, TEEB work on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity, and the UK’s National Ecosystem Assessment. He was looking

forward to the opportunity represented by the Government's Natural Environment White Paper. He saw this as a step along the way to his desired outcome - making nature an essential of life here in the UK.

Landscape architect Merrick Denton-Thompson then painted a compelling picture of a future – when landscapes would be multi-functional, and powerful sequesters of carbon and manipulators of the climate.

His future generations would recognize that all land should be managed in a semi-natural relationship with humans. Designations like SSSIs, NNRs, SACs, RAMSAR, Local Nature Reserves, National Parks and AONBs would all become redundant – because local people would manage land everywhere to sustain and enhance it.

He suggested that intensive agricultural systems would have been transformed. Livestock would be found only on extensive grazing – making meat a rather expensive luxury. Arable systems would depend on integrated crop management and new perennial seed bearing crops. Forests would be producing food, biomass and construction materials. We would be conserving carbon in the soil everywhere, and people would need to travel a good deal less.

Elsewhere in society, for example, are people passionate about building a new London Airport in the Thames Estuary, because they think that ever more people will want to fly from place to place. Indeed, many governments around the world are looking to invest in this way – so as not to miss out on economic growth.

In achieving more across rural and urban landscapes, can we work with the grain of growth – even growth that falls well short of sustainable development goals?

Lesson number one then: express an ambitious outcome, by all means, but be aware that others will have different outcome ambitions – which may not be entirely compatible.

Bending mindsets outside your peer group may be crucial if your desired outcome is to be at all deliverable.

DELIVERY BREAKTHROUGHS

So, what did Merrick have to say about the challenge of delivering his desired outcome? What was the breakthrough driver?

Was it a change in politics in the face of catastrophe? Or riots and hunger strikes as natural resources became scarcer? Or cataclysmic climate events? He certainly didn't put a lot of weight on government White Papers. And he didn't mention global meetings in Doha, Durban, Cancun or Rio.

No. He suggested that change would come from:

- a new localism imperative, leading to a recognition that rich, diverse, high quality local landscapes were important; and
- empowerment of the young through education and influence; a reconnection of children with nature – by transforming schools and releasing teachers to apply their passion, innovation and commitment to developing young minds.

CHANGING MINDSETS LOCALLY

I am working with my local Town Council on a neighbourhood plan. And my wife is Chair of Governors at a large comprehensive school. There's lots of goodwill but no sign of the sort of mindset change that will lead to an unstoppable movement.

Perhaps this is because as a nation we seem to be better at being against things than for things – better at fearing change than hoping for it. The row over the Government's ideas to streamline planning guidance provides a good example.

I have long worked on planning and sustainable development issues. Surely the social justice demands that everyone should have access to reasonable housing at a reasonable price. We don't have enough decent housing now – so where do the new homes needed go?

Certainly on reused land in urban areas, where access to services will be easier. Certainly by reusing vacant office buildings and encouraging more efficient use of space.

But we can't rely on the planning system alone to achieve that. Changes are needed in landlord and tenant legislation, and rather a lot more public or private expenditure to fix up the derelict sites in urban areas.

And, should we not be trying to influence the source of demand? The City of London's global success imposes ever more pressure on an already crowded south east - when housing would be much easier to deliver in the midlands and north.

So, in responding to the draft new consolidated policy, did people put forward a whole series of ideas for achieving housing development needs – embracing planning and the other government levers? No. In the main, most people focused on what they didn't want: rather than on putting forward their own positive alternatives to meet the outcome of a decent home for all.

European Environment Agency research tells us that this is not unusual. Embedding a long-term policy perspective in environmental policymaking poses big challenges for both institutional and governance arrangements. Two factors are particularly relevant:

- the problem **structure**:

environmental problems are long term, complex and uncertain;

- the problem-solving **context**:

policymaking is often short term, compartmentalised and dominated by advocacy making it very hard to introduce the long-term perspective.¹

So, Merrick's vision was pretty compelling. But his delivery breakthrough was not.

MINDSET CHANGE NEEDS TO BE INTERNATIONAL

Our world is globally ever more interdependent – whether we are talking about governments or big business domination of what we do. Nothing short of a global mindset change will do.

Working positively with others – the theme of this conference - needs to extend well beyond local partnerships in the UK. We need to take all our drive of localism and show the world a better way forward.

We British have a good track record in such leadership – of working internationally and being respected for it. Look at what Nicholas Stern has done to inform global opinions. Look at our continuing commitment to investment in international development – even at a time of recession. Look at Caroline Spelman's readiness to engage the Brazilians on landscape change. Look at the influence our higher education system can offer foreign students through the strengths of our universities and institutions.

The world is a better place for these interventions. But can we ever change peoples' mindsets enough to trigger the kind of shift that is implicit in visions such as presented by Merrick?

After all this localism idea is not exactly new. Twenty years after the first Rio, we recall the theme "Think globally, act locally". And many of us have been acting locally for the last twenty years.

I recall the excitement around the Local Agenda 21 theme. I

was Chair of Local Agenda 21 in the London Borough of Richmond, where councilors were willing to give the lead to the local community.

Rio 1992 produced two international agreements (on biodiversity and desertification) a framework convention on climate change and principles for sustainable forestry. So, plenty of vision there for delivery – whether locally or globally.

I also worked on the UK's first Sustainable Development White Paper – under John Gummer, very much building on Chris Patten's earlier comprehensive White Paper. We set out action plans and reported on progress.

But has every nation followed through on Rio 1992? Is there enough progress in the last 20 years to give us hope that we might transform our approach to natural resources in the next 20?

I am skeptical. The flier for the conference suggests it represents an opportunity to move away from business as usual.

But I fear that it will be international summit like so many others. The two proposed themes don't seem to offer much potential for breakthrough solutions:

- a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and
- the institutional framework for sustainable development.

Frankly, political leadership and commitment has been lacking. But we shouldn't blame politicians alone for that. In many countries the politics are driven by the mindset of the population at large – either through democratic processes or by the fear of unrest.

The original Rio was right in what it set out to achieve. The outcome vision was clear enough; but delivery has been derailed by other imperatives.

So, I'd like to see more focus on a global outcome; and a culture encouraging breakthrough solutions. That requires the attendance and commitment of the world's most senior leaders; after all, who else has the potential to change people's mindsets internationally?

THE NEED FOR A REALITY CHECK

Equally, we need to be conscious of the development needs in less well off nations. We need to be ready for every scenario from rapid growth to global recession, including the instability that can flow when food or energy are in short supply.

This where scenario analysis comes in – carried out by big businesses, international organisations and governments alike - as an important reality check thinking the barely thinkable, to see what extreme assumptions deliver.

In the context of Rio, I was interested in the assumptions and projections by the International Energy Agency. A bold change of policy direction is needed, they say – globally – to avoid the world locking itself into an insecure, inefficient and high-carbon energy system. Growth, prosperity and rising population will inevitably push up energy needs. So, governments need to introduce stronger measures to drive investment in efficient and low-carbon technologies.

Even in their central scenario

- primary energy demand will increase by one-third between 2010 and 2035, with 90% of the growth in non-OECD economies
- the transport fleet will double in emerging economies, burning more fuel, while alternative energies will take longer to come through
- by 2035 China will consume nearly 70% more energy than the United States, although its per capita demand will still be less than half the US level
- Demand for coal will be 65% higher by 2035 and we are about to enter a golden age of gas – shale gas
- Renewables will struggle to keep up with growth, going

from 13% of the mix today to 18% in 2035, even if underpinned by subsidies rising from \$66 billion in 2010 to \$250 billion in 2035, support that in some cases cannot be taken for granted in this age of fiscal austerity

Perhaps the world leaders in Rio can be forgiven for finding breakthroughs difficult: the pace of development is so strong. In creating visionary outcomes, they have to take the art of the possible from reasonably researched scenarios.

The test is whether they can draw up a realistic business plan to deliver ambitious outcomes – and ditch what doesn't contribute positively.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MANAGING MORE LOCAL INITIATIVES

This is a model we can all follow. I was recruited me as a Head of Department in the Scottish Government to bring a fresh approach to rural and environmental delivery. My approach was to focus first not on what we were doing, but on the outcomes our work was intended to deliver. And by outcomes I didn't mean legislation processed, licences approved or grants paid. I meant things happening on the ground – real outcomes.

Engaging staff, external help and stakeholders, we found 10 strategic outcomes that summed up the Department's core business aims. The staff themselves then reframed their work to serve the outcomes – for example changing grant payments to better reflect public goods delivered. We sought to stop work that did not contribute to outcomes, or looked to make it lower priority.

We moved our business between divisions so that every outcome had a Head of Division as principal owner; they were challenged to work out better ways of achieving the outcomes they had been allocated. Accountable for the delivery of specific outcomes, they then developed operational delivery plans.

I call this the outcomes approach to delivery. It helped liberate people to think creatively. This is where breakthrough management comes in.

Free from the “this is how it’s always been done ...”, people are authorized to innovate and find new ways of doing things. While there are some limitations - accounting rules and the like - breakthrough techniques can create innovation in public policy, and delivery.

You have to start by setting aside assumptions about how things need to be done – instead challenge processes, beliefs and rituals. Lift your eyes to the long term and form a holistic view of what success looks like. Then, devise tactics and broad delivery strategies for getting there. When someone says “that’s just impossible”, double the stretch and see if that leads to more innovative solutions.

LESSONS FOR LOCAL GREEN LEADERS TODAY

In short, you need to go from:

- We are here today, this is what we are doing now, and what do we do next: to
- This is where do we can aim to be in the future, and this is our breakthrough strategy for getting there

There are plenty of examples of innovation and breakthrough thinking in your areas of work. Think about the community forests for example – and the National Forest – making long term changes to landscape. Think about the ‘green city’ movement over the last 150 years.

The Victorians longed to introduce more ‘green’ into their congested and polluted cities. Pioneers were determined to improve living conditions in post-industrialised Britain. Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City was breakthrough – a completely new way of thinking about development. He started with Utopia and worked back.

Today in inner city Detroit and other cities, vacant lots are being taken over for urban agriculture. Is this a way of delivering the post-modern garden city – a breakthrough in line with our current enthusiasm for eco-living and an emerging distrust of multinational retail corporations?

Prime examples of localism like ‘guerilla gardening’ and ‘meanwhile gardens’ such as Eastern Curve in Dalston are breakthroughs becoming mainstream practice. I don’t see anything but city government enthusiasm for America’s equivalent – the West Side Highline – but the City Council itself would never have invented it.

My point is that if governments liberate innovation and make space for breakthrough solutions, we stand more chance of delivering on our aspirations – locally and globally too.

So, what lessons does this offer for you today, as you use today’s conference to build your capabilities and networks? I suggest:

- Paint a good picture and express projects in terms of outcomes that inspire, rather than processes;
- Engage as many people and organisations in what you seek to achieve;
- Ensure you reflect the reality of context; others may be pursuing goals that conflict with yours;
- Use scenarios to test your future vision;
- Revise your priorities to cut out sideshows and focus on outcome delivery;
- Identify potentially innovative breakthroughs by being open to creative challenge;
- Be clear who will be doing what, and how they will account for progress;
- Use modern communications to spread your stories internationally, to change mindsets through the backdoor as well as Rio;

Take pride in what you have done to change the world – and

in what you have inspired others to do!