

Greener Neighbourhoods is designed to help social housing managers secure funds for projects affecting 8.2m residents

'Social green space' guide is launched

By Jez Abbott

A green space guide designed to help social housing managers make the case for investment in green space was launched this week by the national social housing partnership Neighbourhoods Green.

The guide highlights the significance of green space managed by social housing landlords who in England run estates housing more than eight million people.

Green leaders spoke at the publication of the good-practice guide to managing green space. Around £42m is spent each year on improving shared spaces around social housing, which accommodates 8.2 million people in England.

Project co-ordinator Nicola



Shared spaces: around £42m a year is spent on improving the areas

KeyStat

The number of people living in social housing in England, which equates to 17 per cent of the country's households



Wheeler said: "In some areas the landscape managed by social landlords is estimated to be equal to or greater than that managed by the local authority parks services."

The report, written by the Neighbourhoods Green partnership, includes case studies and 10 key principles, such as the need to take a strategic approach to improvements,

prioritise maintenance and get residents involved.

The *Greener Neighbourhoods* study found that nine-tenths of social landlords used external contractors, just under a half used direct labour and a fifth involved volunteers in the upkeep of their green spaces (see box).

Gordon Dickson, portfolio manager at housing association Places for People, included in one of the report's case studies, said: "We need bespoke management plans, not one-size-fits-all for contractors. We are looking at several models and also how to get budgets down to residents. Some residents are put off by the thought of having to manage budgets and be accountable."

Key facts

- 66 per cent of all green space visits are within 2m of home.
- 37 per cent of landlords have food-growing areas on their spaces.
- 33 per cent of landlords are responsible for nature and woodland areas.
- 84 per cent of landlords use external grounds' contractors.

Historic Houses Association seeks Heritage Lottery cash

The Historic Houses Association (HHA) is striving to ensure that private properties get their share of Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grants, its president Edward Harley has said.

A recent statement from HLF said it would "explore whether there are models that would allow limited funding of capital and conservation work to privately

owned heritage... where the benefits from tourism... outweigh any private gain".

Speaking at the HHA's Historic Buildings, Parks & Gardens event in London this week, tourism minister John Penrose said eight out of 10 tourists came to the UK for its cultural and heritage attractions, generating £4.3bn a year. The London 2012 Olympics and the Diamond

Jubilee presented more opportunities.

Penrose stressed that the National Planning Policy Framework would mean no reduction in protection of heritage, which would remain at the PPS5 level, and that the 'mansion tax' proposed by the Liberal Democrats "was not being actively pushed across my desk". He pledged to cut red

tape for live entertainment and brown tourist signs.

Harley said privately owned heritage houses were more innovative than other visitor attractions, citing Longleat's ice rink, Eastnor Castle's mud-running events and Dalemain's dog-blessing ceremonies.

He added that the TV series *Downton Abbey*, filmed at Highclere Castle, was part of

a broadcast boom for members, with the 72 houses currently being used for 130 TV productions charging up to £4,500 a day in fees.

English Heritage figures showed the annual 17.3 million visits to historic houses were the most for a single sector, but Harley warned that the repair backlog had risen 50 per cent in six years to £390m.

Surveyors consult on paper on Japanese knotweed risk assessment

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) is consulting on an information paper that aims to help valuers and mortgage lenders consider the implications of Japanese knotweed.

RICS said some lenders have reviewed their policies to decline loans against affected properties, and some



Japanese knotweed: invasive

sales were not being completed as a result.

The institution claimed

that with correct treatment, knotweed need not be a "life sentence for a property" and should be assessed in a similar way to subsidence and asbestos. RICS is consulting on this to develop best-practice guidelines.

RICS representative Philip Santo said: "A standard risk assessment framework is

being proposed to help valuers provide more informed advice to their clients and to enable lenders to adopt more balanced policies.

"As the treatment industry develops and matures, it is hoped that Japanese knotweed will soon become just one more consideration in the complex valuation

process. The consultation aims to canvass opinion to help make this happen."

RICS is inviting responses from members, lenders and treatment experts. The consultation runs until 9 December and can be found at consultations.rics.org/consultation/japaneseknotweed/consultationHome.