Vision for 2040: Biodiversity

Discussion notes from SRS Staff and Student Workshop, Wednesday 8th March 2017

# Our Vision for 2040

**Group 1:**

* The Central Area was particularly poor on the biodiversity front, with cobbled dead space around Teviot and Old College, and too much hard landscaping overall – a more creative approach to the quads was needed, as well as measures to increase the number of butterflies in town (as had been done with the wild flowers at ECCI)
* There was potential for student projects in this area and greater links to teaching and research overall
* KB was an example of good practice (though not putting biodiversity at the forefront of the KB masterplan was a missed opportunity), along with IGMM at the Western General (particularly the wild flower area at the front of the building to encourage insects). Pollock Halls was also felt to be performing well
* The impact of the Estates reshuffle had moved biodiversity down the agenda. The group felt that overall biodiversity was not being prioritised as there was not the same financial impetus as with energy, waste, and climate change. Biodiversity was difficult to quantify, though it had a major impact on health and wellbeing
* It was proposed that UoE start by getting rid of car parks
* One approach would be to look at each space in turn, to ensure UoE was making the most of it
* The first step would be to write a business case including consideration of productivity, student satisfaction, and opportunities to build a sense of community
* The Group noted the positive impact of trees on mental health and wellbeing and as an aid to concentration (particularly important in a University environment)
* The Group noted that George Square was lost to the Festival at the height of summer, impacting on biodiversity and staff and student wellbeing
* The Group stressed the importance of partnership working on town planning, looking at the wider impact on the city, building corridors (e.g. to the Meadows), and gaining a better understanding of what contribution the University’s assets make to routes for wildlife through the city
* Peffermill was one area which could be targeted for additional hedges and trees along the boundary line
* Endemic trees should be selected over ornamental, and trees with a longer lifespan should be preferred. Working with experts in biological sciences, a list of preferred species could be put together to issue to contractors
* Meadow-type spaces required less maintenance than lawn
* Biodiversity should be made a major concern for new builds and stronger emphasis should be made on these issues for all future projects
* The Space Manager would be a useful contact in identifying dead spaces
* Campus-based biodiversity groups were proposed.

**Group 2**

* The Group discussed anticipated changes to the climate, with exponentially more flooding and droughts, and what this meant for the University, including the impact on heating and cooling loads, and the need to replace concrete and stone plazas with more green gathering spaces
* It was unclear whether existing legal requirements around sustainable drainage systems impacted on existing spaces, though this would be an opportunity for UoE to demonstrate leadership
* There were already flooding issues at KB from Blackford Hill
* There was no overall biodiversity report for the University, but there were extant surveys for KB and Pollock
* Attendees noted that of all the SRS topics addressed at the workshop, biodiversity was receiving least attention and was not being addressed strategically. Current activity was scattered action by individuals rather than a joined-up approach
* More green roofs would be worth investigating, in terms of water runoff attenuation and health benefits. The Findhorn Foundation had information on installing green roofs cheaply. They were a marginal cost on new builds but expensive to retrofit
* Community gardens could be an option for buildings where there was sufficient staff and student interest
* The Group discussed the sky garden on the walkie talkie building in London which was an enclosed environment
* There was research potential in partnership with the Botanics, which were encouraging organisations to grow unusual species in order to spread expertise.

**Group 2**

* UoE was not publicising what it was doing on biodiversity
* QMRI had a number of positive examples of green spaces and there was a lot of scope for biodiversity action at Little France
* The University was looking at investing in peatlands and sustainable estate management
* UoE could do more to support volunteering opportunities for students in these areas
* The signalling potential of growing food on Old College lawn was discussed
* Vines / creepers / trellises were proposed for cement buildings
* Attendees discussed issues of upkeep of plants in buildings
* The Group recommended an annual biodiversity count / survey, which could be carried out by the same Masters course each year.