

# Roots manoeuvre

A Green Infrastructure Audit, commissioned by the BID team in 2010, has sown the seed of a greener, more biodiverse future for SW1. **Chris Kilvington** digs a little deeper.

Climb above the Victoria and Westminster skyline, up to floors nine and ten of the building that houses London Underground and St James's Tube station, and you might be surprised to find two green roofs planted with a variety of native wildflowers, sedums and bulbs. Away from the rush below, the living roofs of 55 Broadway don't just sit pretty but play an important function, soaking up rainwater and providing a wildlife habitat that encourages rare invertebrates like sand bees.

These urban features might be extraordinary today but, if a recent audit of green infrastructure in SW1 is anything to go by, they might not be in the years to come. The survey, which was drafted by Land Use Consultants and the Green Roof Consultancy as part of VBID's Clean and Green initiative, sought out existing parks, green spaces, wildlife sites, trees, features incorporated into the built environment – like the roofs above 55 Broadway – and other public and private spaces. More importantly perhaps, it also noted potential for enhancing existing green features and introducing new ones.

“At ground level, we are looking at planting more trees, beds and rain gardens,” said Martin Kelly, Managing Director of land planning firm Capita Lovejoy and Chair of the Clean and Green Steering Group. “The next dimension from there is green wall technology and then to roof level with green and brown roofs. There is the fourth dimension too: that of time and maintenance, which will be key to the success of what we do.”

As the name suggests, the Clean and Green initiative is a story in two parts. The audit is the BID team's biggest step on the 'green' side, setting a baseline for development that will not only make the district more attractive for people and businesses but also bring significant

benefits to the economy and the environment, including new habitats and migration routes for wildlife, help to adapt to climatic changes and increasing flood risk, cooling air during hotter months and reducing the effects of pollution. On the ground, verges, planting beds and rain garden features could offer a visual greening effect while alleviating surface-level flooding by allowing water to soak away rather than enter the storm water system. Potential sites have been identified for green walls, which offer similar benefits. And, though there are ground-level opportunities to introduce native plants that attract birds and insects – Lower and Upper Grosvenor Gardens, for example – green roof installations appear to offer the best opportunity for encouraging wildlife.

“We know that around 32% of central London buildings have flat roofs that could be greened,” said Dusty Gedge of the Green Roofs Consultancy.” In total, around 29 hectares of SW1 roof space was surveyed and, of this space, 25 hectares showed the potential to support living roof habitats. The study also pinpointed opportunities to enhance over 1.5 hectares of existing infrastructure and create more than a hectare of new green features below roof level. “This VBID initiative is already becoming an exemplar project,” said Dusty, “because I can’t think of anywhere in the world where a neighbourhood has been assessed in this way, even in North America.”

As a major commercial centre and transport hub, enhancement and regeneration in Victoria is seen as a priority in Westminster City Council’s Local Development Framework, while urban greening and climate change are also at the heart of government and London mayoral policy. Considering their modern-day significance, the Clean and Green initiative and audit steering group has attracted input from a wide range of organisations including the London Biodiversity Partnership, the Greater London Authority and Natural England.

“This is definitely a unique piece of research,” said Martin Kelly. “I also don’t think there’s ever been a delivery group like ours, which puts us in a very unique position.”

“Our vision is to create one of the greenest business improvement districts – not just in London, but anywhere. The survey gives us our

baseline, and the next steps are design and feasibility and then delivery. It's very exciting."

*You can read more about the vision and progress of the Clean and Green initiative at [www.insw1.com](http://www.insw1.com).*