

INVESTMENT HAS BEEN FORTHCOMING FROM BEYOND THE GARDEN FESTIVALS AND HAS INCLUDED THE NEW TRAM STATION AT PRAGSATEL WHICH INVOLVED MOVING THREE FEDERAL HIGHWAYS AND TUNNELLING NEW LINES UNDER THE PARK

They may no longer be the political flavour of the month in Britain, but if Stuttgart's experience is anything to go by garden festivals can attract private sector money for urban renewal projects, says Peter Sheard

Gardening for growth

In October last year the fifth Garden Festival at Ebbw Vale closed its gates and thereby terminated the festival movement in the UK.

Conceived initially as a response to the Liverpool riots in 1981, they continued to be motivated by political rather than planning, objectives. When they failed to produce adequate revenue and sustain development they were shelved as a failed experiment. This situation contrasts sadly with the German experience, where the value of the International Horticultural Exhibitions (IGAs) and Bundesgartenschau (BGSs) is not open to doubt.

The latest example was the IGA held in Stuttgart this year, which completes a sequence of five festivals, each contributing to the city's open space provision.

Stuttgart's long-term aim, now realised, was to complete the 'Green U', an 8km-long swathe of parks extending from the centre of the city to the outskirts. This piecemeal creation has taken over 60 years and is a textbook example of the value of long-term landscape planning.

As we in the UK continue to re-examine how to approach the regen-

eration of our inner cities, the example of Stuttgart and its history of festivals is worthy of study.

The concept of the 'Green U' was first promoted in the 1920s with the setting aside of the Rosensteinpark at the Volkspark at the centre of the potential open space network.

In 1939 and 1950 two horticultural shows connected the Hohenpark with adjacent spaces, while two BGSs in 1961 and 1977 reconstructed the lower to upper Schlossgartens. These festivals characteristically involved extensive infrastructure improvements, such as road diversions and public transport provision.

The final link involving the redesign of the Wartberg and Leibfriedscher Garten constituted the main reason for the IGA in 1993, providing 30 hectares of new park effectively connected to the existing parks by strikingly designed bridges. As a result, a cyclist or disabled person can travel totally unhampered by traffic through a historical record of parks.

The planning of the IGA was meticulous. Stuttgart planned for the IGA to complete its 'Green U' as early as 1977 and by 1979 the City submitted its successful application to the Zentralverband Gartenbau Bonn (ZGV).

The ZGV organisation is responsible for horticultural standards in Germany and an important part of its function is to award the festivals to applicant cities. Its expertise is continually evolving and is made available to the chosen city when it is planning its festival.

An equivalent body in the UK would have made a lot of difference to the planning of our festivals. By 1984 the Stuttgart parliament had agreed a budget of DM110m for the permanent park and DM130m for the festival events with additional funding for the infrastructure works.

Two years later a competition was launched to design the IGA with the overall objective of "a responsible approach to Nature in the City". The winning design (by Luz-Egenhofer-Lohrer-Schlauch), was considered to solve the problems of scale and layout by providing a cohesive park system. Construction works were underway by 1988 with the aim of an April 1993 opening.

The design of the Stuttgart IGA reflected its ambitious budget and contained some effective landscape design, such as the integration of landscape and a well-executed bridge design, while one of the most valuable IGA investments was the restoration of the Hohenpark, involving the rebuilding of many of the huge sandstone walls and terraces at considerable expense.

The actual IGA site covered over 100 hectares but the investment extended beyond the festival boundaries. The most impressive example was the new tram station at the Pragsattel which involved moving three federal highways and tunnelling new lines under the park.

The stop itself was a collection of light steel and glass structures emphasised by sandstone detailing and surrounded by greenery. The value of such similar investments on the Jubilee Line out to the east of London would be enormous, but it seems highly improbable that a Garden Festival is going to be likely cause as in the case of Stuttgart.

In addition, most of the roads approaching the IGA were upgraded with extensive tree-planting, while further afield the IGA caused the upgrading of Stuttgart's airport and the construction of a new conference centre.

Inevitably, the IGA did have its problems and failures. In design terms, although the Wartberg was the focus of the IGA, it was the least successful of the parks, and in this area the IGA ran into problems with the garden clearance and tree felling required. It caused the Green Party to contrast the IGA concept with actuality and a public boycott ensued. Financially, Stuttgart was lavish, as a consequence of planning the festival in the booming 1980s, but the current economic climate means the city now faces some unpalatable cut-backs.

Nevertheless, the IGA was a considerable success, fulfilling its primary objective of providing greenspace on a sustainable basis. The festival, along

with many others in Germany since their conception in the 1950s, had other regenerative benefits. They also act as 'target-makers', forcing the completion of other projects that otherwise would not happen. This in turn causes private sector investments, which has been seen in Stuttgart with a rash of bank and office building. The significant image boost this gives a city capitalises on the marketing potential a festival can provide. Private sponsorship in Stuttgart not only boosted the festival's income from its 7m visitors, but is set to continue reflecting the permanence of the improvements which are attractive to potential developers.

Against this background, it is not surprising to learn that faith in the festival movement in Germany is unwavering, with BGSs planned until the year 2007. An interesting new momentum is being provided by the declaration of a number of festivals to the old East Germany, thereby returning to the original motivating factor — namely, reconstructing decaying urban fabrics.

The German festivals act as examples to the rest of Europe and are emulated by the Swiss, Dutch and more lately the UK — unfortunately, our attempts were ditched before they had the opportunity to create a similar impact.

Why was this, and isn't there a case for their revival? A major drawback in our festival planning was the Government's approach in linking their worth directly to their ability to generate development. In doing so, green-space provision was ignored and the full benefits of the reclamation schemes fostered by the festivals was squandered. Consequently, they failed to raise political awareness of the potency of landscape planning as a catalyst to economic revival as demonstrated in the German and Dutch models, despite the fact that we spent almost the same amount of money.

Instead our festivals channelled the larger part of their funding on temporary events, minimising the long-term impact and failed to attract serious investment. The image effect demonstrated so effectively at Stuttgart was lost, because the failure to put money into the similar long-term infrastructure work meant that the impression of decay was not reversed. The paradox is that we are then left with ex-festivals struggling to find a new use, as witnessed in Scotland where the Glasgow Development Agency is planning how to rejuvenate 25 hectares of the 1988 festival site by a competition scheme. Not all our festival impacts are bad (Overspool Promenade at Liverpool, for example) but we have little to show for the huge investment.

The current planning situation is not promising either. The lack of political priority to open space planning is revealed in the current legislation that aims to set up the Urban Regeneration Agency (URA) which has a £350m budget and a remit to reverse inner-city deterioration. The almost total ab-

The Hohenpark in Stuttgart is one of the most successful designs that constructed the existing park

sence of strategic greenspace planning is telling. Last year's consultation papers were coolly received by professional bodies; indeed the RTPI said the URA should have "a statutory duty to improve the environment and not simply secure development" and should "enhance the amount of greenspace in our cities". The political dimension is critical to the future and if the Government really wished to see the cultural and economic benefits of using greenspace to cause revival then the German Garden Festivals are good examples.

However, they are by no means the only ones. The equivalent in The Netherlands, the 'Florades', are consciously planned to promote commercial development. At the same time, they incorporate housing, parks and industry as part of the long term planning of the festival which often takes as long as 12 years.

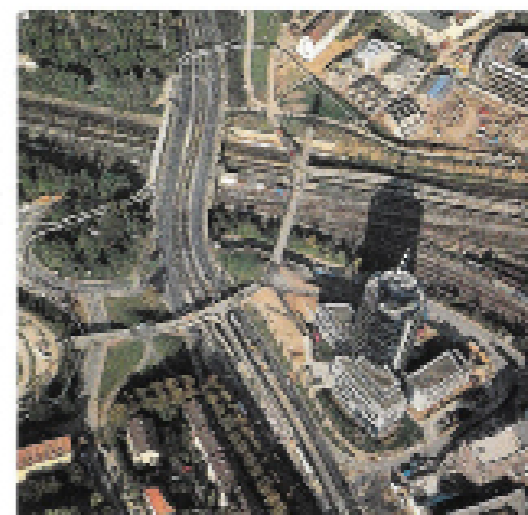
The geometric plan of the 1992 Florade at Zaaiweter near The Hague covered an area of 66 hectares and was a direct reflection of the future layout of roads and parks. This well-planned festival left a legacy of a 33 hectare park which will serve the social housing and industries which are now being constructed.

The festival also promoted the Dutch horticulture industry, attracted lots of paying visitors and undoubtedly benefited both the public and private sector.

France is also contemplating similar events, although of significance has been their commitment to new park provision to revitalise areas. The Parc de Clichy in Paris is one of the latest to be completed and demonstrates a willingness to use landscape planning to great effect — already private investment in offices and housing has followed.

Another relevant European example is Barcelona, where a huge percentage of the municipality's budget has been channelled into the 'Municipalising' of the city to enhance its economic life, and this strategy almost certainly helped the city in its bid to host the 1992 Olympics — perhaps an IGA at Manchester would have promoted its cause.

A garden festival in an ideal vehicle to advertise regeneration as it is a direct product of a marketing and publicity machine allied to a planning concept. A new series of festivals should be launched as a centre piece of a national open space strategy and linked to any number of significant events, for example, the 'New Millennium', the next Olympic bid, an environmental Expo, or perhaps the con-



struction of new city landmarks, such as the Convention Centre at Birmingham. We needn't spend the same money as at Stuttgart; we could have a greater number of smaller events similar to the German 'Landeschaus', which are becoming much more popular by distributing benefits over a wider area.

However, continuity is all important as the authority the German festival machine commands will testify.

The European examples have used landscape to raise the prestige of various cities in the same way good landscape design will enhance the commercial profile of a business park, but on a much wider scale.

Our current economic constraints should not hold us back: the URA's budget is not a modest one and other sources of income should be harnessed. For example, private sector sponsorship has been made available for the long-term maintenance of many parks in the US, and charitable trusts are currently helping to preserve the quality of parks in London and elsewhere.

Another source of funding could be the proposed National Lottery which should recognise the cultural benefits of new park design. We find the Arts: why not parks? Britain virtually invented the public park and can use them again to redefine our urban environment. This is happening elsewhere in Western Europe but hardly at all here.

For this to happen, political priorities will have to change. The possible causes are varied; continuing pressure from the professional bodies, political insecurity, or perhaps from the EC whose Green Paper on the Urban Environment lays great emphasis on the greenspace planning. The Government might yet be forced to act, although greater foresight would be a more positive solution. In Stuttgart the IGA was planned over a period of 14 years and four elections to the Parliament. Such commitment here would pay enormous dividends.

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