

Landscape architect urges sector to create water-efficient designs

By Sophie Barnett

A landscape architect researching long-term solutions to water problems has said everyone in the profession must follow suit.

Kim Wilkie is leading a sub-group on the Conservative Party's quality of life task force and examining potential drought solutions.

But he has stressed that everyone must now realise that the drought problems are "accumulative" and will not go away unless action is taken.

The task force is looking at the idea of porous pavements and car parks, which would allow rainwater to top up groundwater supplies, and dual plumbing so that washing water and run-off from roofs does not all go into the main sewer.

But Wilkie said all landscape architects and designers should already be making sure their designs and layouts use "every drop of rain that falls on the ground". This includes harvesting rainwater and making sure designs do not allow water to drain off into the main sewer system.



Wilkie: drought problems will not go away unless action is taken

Wilkie said: "It's fundamental thinking for the whole profession. I would hope that an awful lot of people in the sector are already thinking this way. It's fundamental to any landscape architect or gardener. They must be acting on it."

He said the real problem is not that water levels in reservoirs are dropping but that huge reserves of water retained in the ground, especially in chalk, are drying up. As the ground dries, it loses its ability to soak up more water.

Wilkie added: "It is not that we have any less water — it's the way we use it. Water goes from sea to rain and then to land. What we have done with so many hard surfaces is rushed the whole process. The water goes back to the sea far more quickly through the sewer."

He said public parks and squares should also play a part in preventing the loss of water. "There should be shallow depressions in the ground. These would collect the water, so that it soaked into the ground and didn't just run off down the drains," he said.

The Conservative Party hopes to change building standards and layouts to alter the way water is used and recycled in all future large developments, such as the thousands of houses planned for the Thames Gateway area.

In May, former environment secretary John Gummer, chairing the Conservatives' task force, introduced a bill into Parliament calling for the impact of water supplies to be considered before all housing developments are agreed.