

ABSTRACT – GREEN ROOFS IN AN URBAN CONTEXT

The precis of this study was the belief that green (planted) roofs have widespread and tangible benefits that are officially recognised and encouraged in certain countries, but to a lesser extent in the UK. These benefits could be particularly advantageous in an urban setting. Anecdotal evidence suggested that architects in Britain currently had an awareness of green roofs and an honest desire to introduce them to the mainstream. However they were encountering barriers to their common acceptance.

A variety of methods were used to investigate this precis. A literature review was undertaken to establish the current state of knowledge and opinion in this field. An email questionnaire was issued to two samples of architects practices in Britain, both of them outside of the (atypical) London area. Four case studies were undertaken of British extensive green roofs, chosen to illustrate a wide variety of locations and types.

The study revealed that over a period of 30 years, green roofs had become established tools of environmental and ecological control in central Europe. Their benefits were now being rapidly popularised in North America. There was a gradual acceptance of extensive green roofs in the UK, but the questionnaire responses indicated that this acceptance was patchy. Extensive green roofs in Britain are being popularised in particular by botanists, ecological groups and enthusiastic individuals. Unlike Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, there was little evidence in the UK of economic or political support for green roofs from elected government bodies.

A conclusion is put forward that extensive green roofs can be equally important and effective in Britain, as they already are so in continental European and North American cities. To harness the public benefits of green roofs will require more than the enthusiastic advocacy of private individuals. Political endorsement at the highest level, economic incentives, revised planning guidelines, coordinated public campaigns, research and active participation by design professionals are examples of the initiatives that are needed to enable the positive effects of green roofs to be felt.