

PROPERTY TIMES

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Barnet

Hadley Wood

Potters Bar

Southgate

Cockfosters

Whetstone

It's a jungle up there



BY AMIR SCHLEZINGER

by ANNIE REID

With its population growing faster than at any time since 1939, sometimes London feels as if it is being strangled by an invisible hand.

But are living standards obliged to drop as builders try to squeeze more and more people onto the same amount of land? Mayor Ken Livingstone's solution is to look skywards to green roofs, roof terraces and roof gardens.

He outlined his plans to 'make London more liveable for its residents... and create a higher quality environment' in the recently-released Living Roofs Statement.

The benefits are both aesthetic and environmental. A green roof involves a layer of soil placed over an existing roof, which helps mitigate flooding by absorbing rainwater, cool buildings down, reduce much of carbon-hungry air-conditioning, reduce frost and erosion and helps with climate change.

A garden roof, where a liveable garden is literally built upon a roof, can be enjoyed as a private space. Oh, and they don't leak.

Germany has led the way since the 70s and its green roofs systems

are made to the highest standards as part of a £39 million industry.

In the UK, big green roof suppliers such as Bauder and Alumasc have reported surges in interest, and landmark buildings are getting in on the act too. Last year's Stirling Prize for architecture was awarded to the Laban Dance Centre in south-east London, which boasts a green roof, as does Rolls Royce's £60 million car factory in West Sussex.

Closer to home in Burnt Oak, a wasteland of vandalised garages was transformed into the environmentally-friendly Gold Lane housing development, with eight low rise two and three-bedroom houses. Its crowning glory is its grass roof, designed for high rainwater absorption, which won it a Housing Design Award from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 2002.

For personal use, it's best to call in the professionals, like Amir Schlezinger, a garden designer who formed his company MyLandscapes three years ago. He studied Garden Design at Middlesex University, attended Capel Manor College and specialises in garden roofs, of which he has designed 25.

He said: "London isn't New York but it's getting there. People are living in denser environments and roof gardens are an answer to creating more space. I am not a housing expert but they certainly add value to a house and I have experienced a lot of interest in roof gardens this year."

Mr Schlezinger advises on ideal roof garden conditions.

- ◆ The property's title deeds need to be in order so that there are no ownership issues.

- ◆ A strong roof that has been built in the last 30-40 years is better.

- ◆ It can be less costly to have a roof garden installed if the house is in the early building phase.

- ◆ It will be easier to obtain planning permission if the property doesn't overlook anything that is heritage protected.

The GLA is loosening planning restrictions to make it easier to build a garden roof, but it isn't cheap, especially when you would like to add one to your existing property.

Of course, the overall value of your property will increase, just as it would with most aesthetic renovations, but it needs to be looked at as part of a long-term financial plan.

For more information, see RIBA's book, *Planting Green Roofs and Living Walls*, by Nigel Dunnett and Noel Kingsbury. The book is £25 from www.ribabookshops.com

These web sites are also helpful: www.mylandscapes.com www.livingroofs.org

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Green back: a garden roof designed by Amir Schlezinger as part of the St George Wharf development in Vauxhall, south London