WLI North America webinar – 30th July 2014
Masterplanning for wetland centres

Marie Banks
Principal Consultant
WWT & WWT Consulting – brief background

Our masterplanning approach

Lessons learned and top tips
Bringing people and wildlife together for the benefit of both

- UK charity founded in 1946 by the naturalist and artist Sir Peter Scott
- Vision to integrate people and wildlife whilst protecting the habitats that they depend on
- Nearly 70 years of experience in wetland conservation and visitor centre management
• 7,000 acres of wetlands (including 7 Sites of Special Scientific Interest & 6 Ramsar sites)

• 9 specialist visitor centres delivering CEPA (Communication, Education, Participation & Awareness)

• Operates Wetland Link International (WLI) – Global network of Wetland Centres
London Wetland Centre – Water storage to wetlands
Other WWT structures
Other WWT structures
The UK’s leading specialist wetland consultancy

- Commercial consultancy wing of WWT set up in 1989
- Helps deliver WWT’s conservation and public engagement objectives
- Generates an income that supports research and conservation
- Staff of 12 - consultants experienced in wetland species, habitats, eco-hydrology, GIS, CAD, interpretation, business strategy and masterplanning
- Offer the experience built up by WWT to others
• Worked on over 60 visitor centre planning projects providing advice on sensitive planning for the benefit of people and wildlife

• Projects in UK, Ireland, Portugal, Norway, Algeria, Oman, UAE, Kuwait, India, China, South Korea, Seychelles, USA, Uruguay
- Mitigation project for the loss of wetlands
- Next to Mai Po/ Inner Deep Bay Ramsar site
- Develop a centre to raise awareness of the importance of wetlands & their wildlife
- Facilitated WLI-Asia and hosted first symposium

- 10,000 sqm exhibition galleries
- 64 ha wetland park creation

Hong Kong Wetland Park
Hong Kong Wetland Park (2001-2006)
Hong Kong Wetland Park Overview
Masterplanning
What is a masterplan?

A document that defines the direction of a project and acts as a point of reference for the subsequent stages of the construction and management of a visitor centre.

The key: being able to project forward to the visitor centre in operational mode to understand the requirements and plan for them.
• Terms of reference for Client
• Describe all attractions, habitats and services
• To guide those involved in the development
• Identify constraints and opportunities
• Produce a revenue model
• Identify appropriate management strategy
• Identify stakeholder involvement
• Provide cost estimate for construction

Aims of a masterplan
What is the vision?

What stories will be told?

Who will come?

How big should it be?

Where should it be located?

How much will it cost?

How will it be operated?

Will it work?

Many masterplanning questions
Why do you want a wetland centre?

- What is special about your site?
- What is the vision for your site?
- Do you need an actual centre?

Feasibility will ascertain whether the overall vision is attainable or needs amending

Objectives need to be clearly set or the development may not meet its aim

Developing an overall vision
• A world class sustainable built visitor attraction engaging a range of audiences about the values of wetlands in a fun and entertaining way
• A protected sanctuary for wildlife
• A focus for ecological and wetland-related research
• A resource centre for the delivery of formal and non-formal education for schools, colleges and public workshops
• A retreat for outdoor recreation and nature enthusiasts
• A meeting facility for local communities, NGOs, companies

Proposed vision for a site
Ensure the site functions & integrates sensitively into the environment

Who is your audience & how will they access your site?
What does your audience need or expect?
Children’s play
Close encounters
Watching wildlife – self-led
Watching wildlife – guided safari
Create facilities that allows wildlife to provide spectacles
Zoning the site to control activities & disturbance levels
Development process
Visitor Centre Planning – One common route

- Habitat Design & Construction
- Architectural Competition
- Architect Appointed
- Building Designed
- Interpretation Designed
- Exhibit Designer/Interpretation Planner Appointed
- Centre Opens
Architecture is important for:

- The operational management of the visitor centre
- Providing a tool to interpret the centre’s content

But, not all architects are specialists in understanding the operational requirements of this type of building and understanding that the building itself is only one element of a broader interpretation plan.
Masterplanning elements for sustainable operation

Habitat creation/ restoration

Business plan
Income
Expenditure
Retail
Buildings
Restaurant
Education

Architectural vision

Interpretation plan & audience/ access
Our development process
Visitor flow

Paid Entry
- Hides
- Habitats
- Pond dipping
- Classrooms
- Exhibit Space
- Welcome & Admission
  - Viewing Gallery
- Cafe
  - Courtyard
- Shop

Free Entry
- Hide

Entrance
- Bus Tour Area

Exit
Facility areas and adjacencies

- Exhibition: 250-1,250
- Café: 150-375
- Car park: 2,000-4,000
- Play area: 150-350
- Staff facilities: 150-400
- WC: 50-100
- Education/corporate: 100-300
- Landscape: 600-1,300
- Access routes
- Viewing tower
- Access

WWT Consulting
• **WHAT** stories do you want to tell?
• **WHO** are you going to tell them to?
• **WHERE** are you going to tell them?
• **WHAT** media are you going to use? (How will you deliver the messages?)

Making it appropriate to your audience
Masterplanning considerations – lessons learned

- Objectives should drive the project
- Consider employing a specialist lead consultant with experience ‘on the ground’
- Architect should ideally work with a specialist visitor centre consultant
- Allow time and budget at the start for development of the concept – this will save time and money later
- Feasibility assessment may in some cases change the project direction
- Consider people and wildlife (ethical and environmental) and synergy between the wetland and the visitor experience
- Government backing or other funding
- Stakeholder involvement
- Good communication
**Client** – investing time and budget at concept stage to ensure operational needs are met and do not have to be retrospectively fitted

**Consultant** – having the experience to be able to project forward to the visitor centre in operation to ensure that all needs are met during design

**Masterplan** – each should be specific to the project thereby creating a unique centre every time