



# GI Newsletter

East of England Region

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## Spring 2011

### Welcome

Welcome to this fourth edition of Natural England's East of England regional GI newsletter. We hope there will be future GI newsletters to share news and information with GI colleagues. From 1<sup>st</sup> April, it's all change at Natural England. Government cuts have necessitated a restructuring, with fewer staff and resources. There will no longer be a regional team, with work organised into functions e.g. Land Use function with seven area teams. This will be the home for the GI work, although it will also be integrated into many of our other work functions, such as land management, biodiversity and landscape, and access and engagement.

In mid May, we will be saying goodbye to Catherine Cairns and Pat Crosby, who are leaving through voluntary redundancy. Other contact names for GI are also changing for the east area. See below.

It is not just in Natural England where there are significant changes in GI staffing across the region. Sadly the dedicated GI officer posts in several partnerships are also coming to an end.

For the last few years, the East of England region has been a strong leader in the promotion, application and delivery of GI planning and projects, as well as training. Our collective experience and good practice has been rolled out across the country, and we should feel proud of what has been achieved. Read on for the latest news.

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## Top award for mksm GI design guide

The GI design guidance prepared for the MKSM partnership area won the 2010 Local Landscape Planning award from the Landscape Institute. Laura Kitson, who led the project, collected the award with the consultants Chris Blandford Associates. The guidance was funded by Natural England and the Environment Agency, and has been very well received in other regions, as the generic checklist of design criteria is applicable to any site masterplan. The guidance emphasises the importance of considering GI throughout the design process and the judges said the guidance provides *“Excellent, clear communication that promotes GI in a simple and effective manner. It promotes GI as a real, achievable and integral part of place-making.”* The guide has also recently gained third place in the regional RTPI awards. To view the guide, click [here](#).



## New government agendas

Over recent months the implications of the new Localism Bill, Big Society and other planning changes for green infrastructure have become a little clearer. We now know that a new National Planning Policy Framework will be developed over the next 12 months with a draft expected in July 2011. The NPPF will replace all existing PPSs and guidance. It will also set out a new designation to protect green areas of particular importance to local communities. It is the Minister's view that the presumption in favour of sustainable development can be put into policy.

The Localism Bill is going through its committee stages in parliament with Royal Assent anticipated in autumn 2011. The complete package of legislation and guidance will be in place by April 2012. Key elements of the Bill of relevance to green infrastructure are the 'duty to co-operate' on local authorities and other bodies in relation to planning for sustainable development – so GI partnerships are very well placed to facilitate this. The Bill introduces a new tier of neighbourhood planning, including the preparation of neighbourhood plans. Here there is a big opportunity to plan in local green infrastructure networks, using the environmental evidence from GI and local greenspace strategies.

The Localism Bill also proposes statutory pre-application consultation by developers with local communities and other bodies on certain developments. We have good tools to help support communities with this, through the six county ANGST reports, and the design criteria checklist in the award-winning *'Green Infrastructure by Design: adding value to development'*. The Essex, Herts, Suffolk and Norfolk ANGSt reports are available on the Natural England [website](#), with the Cambs and Beds reports to be uploaded in April.

## GI Champions network

This virtual network was set up by Natural England in autumn 2009, and the chair transferred to the Forestry Commission in April 2010. It is hoped that the network will continue in future, with the next event due to take place in Chelmsford on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2011. It will be hosted by Greenspace East, in partnership with the GI network, and will focus on future opportunities for GI delivery in the changing landscape of localism and Big Society. More details from Bob Ivison [bob@ivisonconsulting.co.uk](mailto:bob@ivisonconsulting.co.uk).

## New summarised list of GI sources

The GI team has recently drawn up a collection of potentially useful resources for anyone planning or delivering green infrastructure projects. The list aims to bring together a wealth of links to useful documents, presentations and websites to make them easily accessible in one place. The document contains a variety of relevant Natural England publications, useful documents published by partners and links to the various green infrastructure strategies already in place in the East of England. To see a copy of the summary, please go to the regional pages of the [Natural England website](#).

## South Essex Parklands Projects countdown to completion

The £11.2m government investment in 5 south Essex greenspaces is approaching completion, but the work to enhance the marshlands of south Essex is set to continue.

- At Wat Tyler Country Park, Basildon Council's new Green Technologies Centre will open to the public by Easter alongside improvements to habitats, access and car parking.
- At Essex Wildlife Trust's Thurrock Thameside Nature Park, the new access route and car park are nearing completion, the stunning new visitor centre should be completed by the autumn and the transformation from waste tip to nature park will open to the public in spring 2012.
- The Land Trust's Canvey Wick project now has planning permission for access, footpaths and a car park and will deliver a programme of habitat enhancements under the management of RSPB. Although this is on a smaller scale than hoped for, it still sees the fruition of years of work by partners including Natural England and Bug-life to secure the future of this fantastic brown-field SSSI. Future negotiations may enlarge the site at a later date
- RSPB's Wildspace Thurrock project has delivered two new bridges and paths enhancing access for local residents, two new bird hides and many habitat improvements
- RSPB's Central South Essex marshes project has resulted in habitat and visitor enhancements at West Canvey Marsh, Vange Marsh, the Discovery Zone at Wat Tyler and is soon to deliver a huge new wetland at Bowers Marsh.
- The strong GI partnership work in south Essex has led to large bids for European and Lottery funding for projects to further enhance the landscape. The aim is to raise awareness of the greenspaces of south Essex and give residents the opportunity to participate in caring for the wonderful sites on their doorsteps.. For further information, contact [John Meehan](#) at Essex County Council.



## New GI access projects

Small amounts of Natural England project budget have supported and enabled four access-related GI projects to be delivered this winter/spring. Huntingdonshire District Council, in partnership with the Cambridgeshire CC Rights of Way team, has been negotiating a missing access link between the new communities in south Peterborough and the northern edge of the Great Fen. In Norwich, another missing access link to the Yare Valley Walk is being delivered by the Norwich Fringe Project, whilst in the Gaywood valley east of Kings Lynn, Natural England has supported the design and production of four new interpretive panels. These will hopefully encourage many more local people to explore their local countryside using the paths network. (See article on Gaywood valley project). A similar project has been supported in the Stort valley near Harlow, where the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust has produced a number of interpretive panels for the railway stations. The stations are key sustainable transport entry points to the valley, which has a string of nature reserves linked by a recently upgraded towpath.

## Haven Gateway

A new Green Infrastructure Strategy for Colchester Borough (within the Haven Gateway area) has recently been completed. The Strategy will go out for formal consultation in May-June. Contact [Beverley McClean](#) for more information.

## Gaywood valley project, Kings Lynn

The Gaywood Valley Project runs until Summer 2012 and is designed to improve the usage of the Gaywood River Valley on the urban fringe of King's Lynn, Norfolk. The potential of this area to benefit local communities was recognised and in 2009 was awarded funding as part of the Sustainable Urban Fringes project. The Gaywood River Valley Project aims to explore and develop a wide variety of connected programmes that will add value to the high quality countryside and distinctive landscape of the project area. Areas of interest include: Biodiversity ♦ Geodiversity ♦ Historic environment ♦ Flood alleviation ♦ Access and health ♦ Learning and education ♦ Community engagement ♦ Training and skills.



During 2011, the project will be holding a number of community engagement events across the area to find out what is important to local people and how they can be encouraged to make the most of the area. Recent additions have included four new interpretation panels (supported by Natural England) to help people learn about the environmental and historical significance of the valley.



The Interreg IVB  
North Sea Region  
Programme



The Gaywood Valley Project is hosted by Norfolk County Council and forms part of the wider European Sustainable Urban Fringes Project. For more information, please contact [Gemma Cousins](#), Gaywood Valley Project Officer or see the following links:

[http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/Business/European\\_funding/NCC062545](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/Business/European_funding/NCC062545)

<http://www.sustainablefringes.eu/home/home.asp>

## Stort Valley Partnership completes the 'Connecting People to the Stort' project



March 2011 sees the completion of the two year project aimed at re-engaging the local community with the wide range of greenspaces in the Stort valley. The project has been largely funded by the last government's Housing Growth Fund monies and Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The final piece of work, with additional financial support from Natural England, will see large, colourful interpretive panels displayed at 6 railway stations along the Lee and Stort, guiding people to the towpath and showing how they can walk from one station to another through local greenspaces. Finger posts will also be installed and map leaflets with additional circular walks will be available from tourist information offices and libraries.

## Herts/Green Arc GI update

A new Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan has been completed jointly for Hertfordshire and the GreenArc area (on the SE Herts, W. Essex and NE London borders), following a second successful stakeholder event on 15 February. Recent activity has concentrated on smoothing the path to future project delivery and a final round of consultation on the strategic plan will follow in April-May. GI Plans were also completed for 6 Hertfordshire Districts in the same contract. This joint approach represents excellent value for money, saving Districts 60% of the average costs of plan development and ensuring high quality, consistent and interlinked plans. For more information contact [Rachel Penny](#) or [Simon Odell](#)

# The Future of Green Infrastructure

For the best part of a decade the concept of green infrastructure has been steadily encroaching on the consciousness of UK policy makers, planners and developers. Realisation has dawned that housing development, especially on the scale calculated to meet current needs, simply can't be countenanced unless it properly accommodates the natural environment.

We also need to create much greener places that foster individual and community pride, health and wellbeing, rather than more soulless beige and grey estates.

## All change?

The Coalition Government has a new take on spatial planning. The way in which Green Infrastructure is designed and applied already chimes with this approach to planning. Green infrastructure strategies can only be pulled together by local authorities in partnership with local voluntary and private sector bodies.

Green infrastructure is also very 'Big Society friendly'. There's a clear track record of community groups participating or leading green space projects. Community led projects to improve the natural environment can quickly make a dramatic difference to the character and feel of a place. This can help to generate civic pride, confidence and a readiness to tackle more ambitious projects.



## A Natural Environment White Paper to endorse GI?

Spring 2011 will see the publication of a Natural Environment White Paper. It emphasises the importance of the 'Ecosystems Approach' for delivering a host of essential ecosystem services, and recognises that a healthy natural environment provides invaluable social and economic benefits for free. It also specifically refers to green infrastructure in recognising that: '... we know not only that parks, green spaces and waterways are valuable to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities but also that, properly managed, they form a network of green infrastructure that can help us manage surface water flooding, filter pollution and cool the city air by between 6 and 12°C – something that will become increasingly vital in a changing climate'.

## Conclusion

Whilst there is certainly no room for complacency, green infrastructure is now a well established concept within spatial planning and certainly within the lexicon of planning, development and land management. Even if the housing building sector is temporarily subdued, the latent demand for millions of new and affordable homes isn't going away and nor is the need to design and adapt places to cope with climate change. Funding, both capital and especially revenue, is going to remain a problem.

Green infrastructure will need to compete ever more fiercely with other demands on reduced local authority budgets and seek new and novel financing measures. We do need to assemble more robust and quantitative evidence for the benefits of green infrastructure, especially its economic benefits. That's something that Natural England is keen to work with others to achieve.

*This article is shortened from "Green Infrastructure – A Concept that's finally come of age?" by Andy Gale, Natural England.*

## News in brief

### Future of CABE

CABE and the Design Council have confirmed they will merge from 1 April, following an agreement reached by the two bodies and government. The new organisation will speak with one voice to support a broad spectrum of design, architecture and public space. It will be the government's advisor on design in business innovation and the built environment. It will provide a "one stop shop" for design support and advice to industry, communities, central and local government encompassing a range of services already provided by both the Design Council and CABE.

### The Big Tree Plant

It's the International Year of Forest in 2011. The [Big Tree Plant](#) launched in December 2010. Sponsored by Defra it aims to increase the number of trees planted in towns, cities and neighbourhoods throughout England. The Big Tree Plant is a national partnership bringing together the wide range of organisations who already plant trees, as well as civic and community groups working with Defra and the Forestry Commission. The campaign is aiming to support the Big Society by getting more people involved in planting and caring for trees and establishing local community tree projects throughout England. The campaign follows last year's coalition manifesto announcement that a national tree planting scheme would be launched.



### The GI Factor toolkit

This [toolkit](#) is attached to the ERDF programme in North West England and its sustainable buildings policy. It asks projects to use the toolkit to identify and design in opportunity for Green Infrastructure. One of the main priorities of the Northwest Operational Programme (NWOP) is to enhance and support the Northwest regional economy. Environmental sustainability has been included in the NWOP to enable negative environmental impacts from projects to be minimised, or mitigated, and positive impacts to be maximised, whilst achieving a lasting and positive difference to the economy and people of the Northwest.

### Liverpool City Council calculates green infrastructure worth £8bn

*(Source: Horticulture Week)*

The [Liverpool Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) was drawn up to make the most of sustainable management of the city's green spaces, trees and waterways. Liverpool City Council worked with the primary care trust to determine the importance of green space to the economy and health and found that green infrastructure was an £8bn asset.

### Benefits of Green Infrastructure Knowledge Portal

This [knowledge portal](#) contains key publications relating to/containing information on the benefits of green infrastructure, including research, policy, evidence notes and case studies.

## Publications



**Managing green spaces: seven ingredients for success** (CABE 2010) Examines how the organisation and structuring of parks and green space services affects their performance. Managing green spaces: seven ingredients for success brings together evidence to assist green space managers, corporate decision-makers and advisors in deciding the future of services. It sets out seven 'ingredients for success.' It also outlines the resources that green space managers can draw on to describe the critical services that green space provides to local communities.

<http://www.cabe.org.uk/publications/managing-green-spaces>

### **Benefits of Green Infrastructure** (Urban regeneration and Greenspace Partnership; Oct 2010)

The [summary report](#) shows communities and local authorities how well-planned and managed green infrastructure can deliver multiple benefits to themselves and businesses. The report supports decision making on green infrastructure, and highlights cost-effective opportunities to achieve local and national policy objectives. It also shows the relationships and interdependency between the benefits, and ways to maximise those benefits. Other project outputs include an in-depth, fully referenced [technical report](#) providing a critique of the current evidence, and a series of supporting evidence notes and case studies.

### **Monitoring Engagement in the Natural Environment** (MENE; Natural England, Sep 2010)

This [report](#) summarises the headline findings from the first year of the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey. The survey collects detailed information on people's use and enjoyment of the natural environment,. Fieldwork took place between March 2009 and February 2010.

The survey covers:

An overview of visits to the natural environment

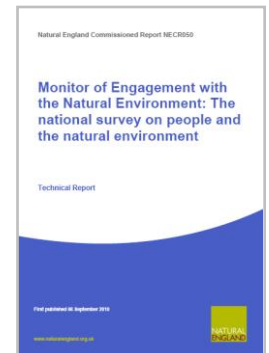
Who? A profile of people that do and don't visit

Where? The destination of visits

What? A profile of visits

Why? Reasons for visiting and not visiting

Enjoying and appreciating the natural environment



### **Blue Sky Green Space** (Green Link, Oct 2010)

The report "Understanding the Contribution Parks and Green Spaces can make to Improving People's Lives" outlines in the broadest sense the wide range of green spaces – from parks and gardens to city farms, country parks, woodlands and wildlife sites to play areas, allotments to urban plazas – and the range of benefits they bring, whether provided and managed by statutory agencies, local authorities or by community led and managed groups such as community gardens or 'Friends Of'.

Click [here](#) to view the report.

### **The Case for Trees. (Forest Research 2010)**

'There is a growing recognition of the importance of trees in the places that we live and work. They provide benefits for us in many ways. Here are just a few:

- Trees absorb and store carbon and so help us in the fight against climate change
- Trees provide shade and cool our urban centres
- Trees reduce the impact of heavy rain by slowing flood water
- Trees are home to many species of insects and birds and urban trees act as a platform for biodiversity
- Trees improve air quality by absorbing pollutants
- Trees have a positive effect on property prices

This document aims to inspire people involved in planning policy and practice to become champions and advocates for trees.'

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-87YEK2>



### **Urban green nation (CABE 2010)**

No one knows exactly how many green spaces there are in our urban areas, where they are, who owns them or what condition they are in. This report presents the findings of the first of two pieces of research commissioned by CABE Space to gauge the state of England's urban green space and its impact on people's health and well-being. It starts to fill the serious information gap highlighted by the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce and its recommendation that this problem should be resolved.

<http://www.cabe.org.uk/publications/urban-green-nation>

### **Economic contribution of green networks (NW Green Infrastructure Think Tank and LUC; July 2009)**

This [study](#) is a review of current evidence and action to examine the relationship between economic regeneration and green networks/green infrastructure, with a particular focus on regeneration in industrial / post industrial urban settings.

### **Community-led spaces (CABE 2010) A guide for local authorities and community groups**

Open spaces function as part of a network that benefits people beyond the immediate locality. This guide is an introduction to the main issues surrounding transfer of public space assets and explores some of the advantages of doing so.

<http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/community-led-spaces.pdf>



### **Improving Young people's Lives (SDC Oct 2010)**

This report looks at the role of the environment in building resilience, responsibility and employment chances. It proposes a green thread through policy and practice, where the impact of the environment is considered alongside social and economic factors – the building blocks of sustainable development.

The main conclusion from this report is that Green exercise, outdoor activity and environmental volunteering maximise young people's employment chances and improves their wellbeing and sense of personal responsibility. <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=1113>

### **Greening the UK - Why more planting (HTA 2010)**

Greening the UK is the campaign to promote the role of plants and open green spaces in creating environmentally and socially sustainable communities.

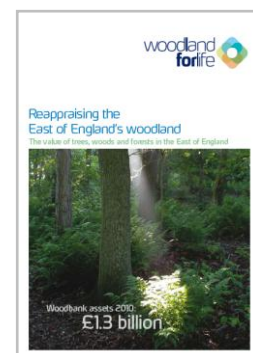
The [report](#) was launched at a conference for town planning, developer, housing and environmental professionals to explore how to deliver environmental and social objectives within the new localism agenda, and examine best practice in the field of sustainable construction.

### **How well prepared is the UK for climate change? - (Committee on Climate Change; Sep 2010)**

This [report](#) of the adaptation sub-committee provides the first national assessment of how well prepared the UK is to cope with the impacts of climate change through adopting measures to adapt to climate change. The report recommends taking a strategic approach to land use planning, including enhancing green space where effective in the design of towns and cities to help manage surface water drainage and cope with rising temperatures and heat waves.

### **Reappraising the East of England's Woodland. (Woodland for Life 2011) 'A reappraisal of the value of the trees and woodlands in the East of England. This was published in January 2011.'**

<http://www.woodlandforlife.net/wfl/default.html>



### **A plain English guide to the Localism Bill (DCLG Jan 2011)**

This [guide](#) describes the main measures under four headings:

- new freedoms and flexibilities for local government
- new rights and powers for communities and individuals
- reform to make the planning system more democratic and more effective
- reform to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally

# Natural England contacts for GI across the region

**Rachel Penny** for general GI issues

**Jonathan Bustard** for Bedfordshire (till June)

**Antony Mould** for Bedfordshire and Luton (from June)

**Janet Nuttall** for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

**Catherine Whitehead** (Kate) for Essex and Hertfordshire

**Helen Ward** for Norfolk and Suffolk

(Email: [firstname.surname@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:firstname.surname@naturalengland.org.uk))



## Lead contact

**Rachel Penny**

01245 284747

## Useful Links

[Natural England's GI guidance and case studies](#)

[Natural England's regional GI webpage](#)

[Country Park accreditation](#)

[Green Flag Award website](#)

[Greenspace](#)

[Greenspace East](#)

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