

Green Infrastructure in the North East

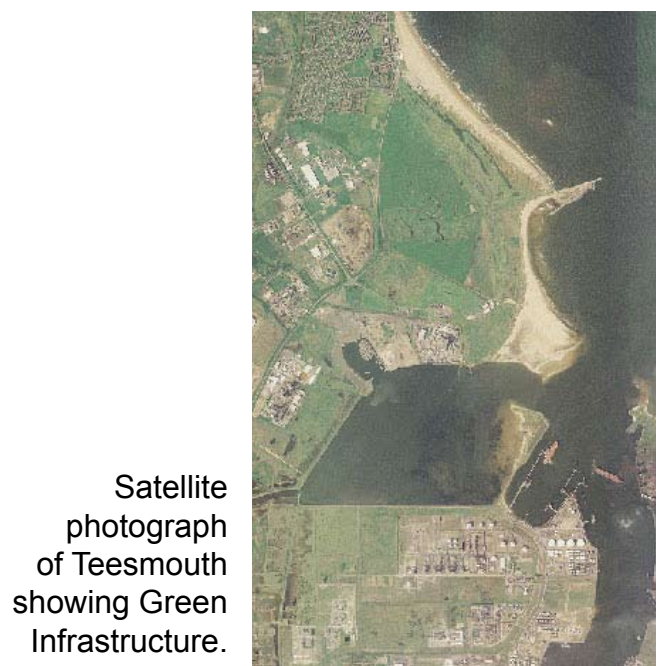
Natural England promotes and advocates the following key messages and calls on partners and political decision makers to consider and promote them.

- The natural environment can make an important contribution to urban regeneration. It can provide locally distinctive places that work with nature to deliver a wide range of benefits including health and wellbeing, climate change adaptation and reconnecting people with nature.
- Green spaces transform urban life by cooling our cities, filtering out pollutants, improving people's health, supporting wildlife and creating attractive places to live and work in.
- A greener neighbourhood can foster civic pride, community cohesion and confidence.
- Necessary housing growth should be accommodated with minimum impact on the natural environment and deliver maximum benefits for the natural environment and people together.
- Investment in Green Infrastructure makes economic sense; interventions unlock the potential functions of assets to release the benefits.
- Better health and wellbeing are two of the major social and economic benefits we can secure through good management of the natural environment in both rural and urban settings.

What is Green Infrastructure?

In a nutshell, Green Infrastructure is a network of connected green spaces that provide economic, social and environmental benefits. Other people have said "The green bits on a satellite image " or "The green glue between the houses that transform a collection of homes into a community".

There are a number of formal definitions, e.g. "Green infrastructure is a network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities. "
(Planning Policy Statement 12 on Local Spatial Planning)



Satellite photograph of Teesmouth showing Green Infrastructure.

There are a number of types of green spaces that together make Green Infrastructure:

Allotments, Amenity space, Brownfield sites, Cemeteries, Children’s play space, Community gardens and urban farms, Country parks, Countryside, Cultural and natural features, Cycleways, Footpaths and bridleways, Green corridors, Historic parks and gardens , Natural & semi-natural habitats, Playing fields, Rivers, streams and other water bodies, Street Trees, Trees & woodlands, Urban parks & gardens, Village greens, Lakes, Ponds, Woodlands ... and the list goes on...

Why is Green Infrastructure important?

Green Infrastructure should be strategically planned and delivered. It should be designed and managed as a “multifunctional” resource - alongside and with the same importance as other essential infrastructure - capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. The individual green spaces that make Green Infrastructure do a lot of different things for individuals, society as a whole and wildlife alike, translating into benefits such as:

- Places for outdoor relaxation and play.
- Space and habitat for wildlife with access to nature for people.
- Climate change adaptation - for example flood alleviation and cooling urban heat islands.
- Environmental education.
- Local food production - in allotments, gardens and through agriculture.
- Improved health and well-being – lowering stress levels and providing opportunities for exercise.



Facts and stats – some examples of Green Infrastructure benefits

- A wooded park can filter out 85% of air pollutants and a street lined with trees up to 70%.
- 91% of people believe that public parks and spaces improve the quality of their lives.
- People who live within 500m of a quality green space are 24% more active.
- Increasing exercise levels of just 1% of the UK’s population would save lives and deliver nearly £1.5bn in health care savings.
- 30% of children are overweight and 70% of school leavers abandon physical activity
Exercise in a green environment significant increases self esteem in 9/10 cases.
- Green space can soak up three and a half times more water than hard areas, reducing the risk of flooding.
- Tree shelter can reduce heating costs by up to 25%.
- 60% of 9 to 11 year olds and 80% of 15 to 16 year olds in the UK are dissatisfied with the quality of outdoor play facilities where they live.
- Green space can increase property values by 6% to 35%.

Green Infrastructure – Why invest now?

Investing now to save costs later



1. The flooding in Morpeth (pictured above ©The Journal) cost approximately £40m. This negative destructive cost may have been partly avoided or mitigated by changing agricultural practices and putting in place green spaces that retain and store water.



2. One heart attack costs the NHS around £12,000. For the same amount a health walking scheme could be initiated with a voluntary walk leader leading regular health walks. This would provide for many people from socially deprived areas having a much better quality of life and improved health. Good quality green spaces are important assets to facilitate such health walks.

Investing now to maximise opportunities



1. The total cost of the Northern Kites project, re-introducing the Red Kite (pictured above © Northern Kites Project) in the Derwent Valley (and beyond) from 2004-2009 was about £610,000.

It supported 12 FTE jobs in the local economy and has generated a minimum of £1.73million in economic activity. This included an improved regional tourism offer and health of local residents and £750,000 visitor spending in the Derwent Valley attributed to the red kites.

The project has also engaged with 170 schools, enlisting 140 volunteers and inspiring 275 community groups (Taking Flight – An evaluation of the Economic benefits of using red kites for Environment led regeneration – March 2009).

2. The cost of setting up Hadrian's Wall National Trail, one of the largest 'green corridors' in the country, was £6m to set up. By December 2005, the positive economic impact of its creation was estimated to be £9.9m from end-to-end and day walkers alone (*Economic Impact Study & Trail User Analysis April 2006*).



Green Infrastructure in the North East

Current momentum for Green Infrastructure strategy development and Implementation comes from Growth Points (Tees Valley, Durham, Newcastle-Gateshead, North Tyneside and South East Northumberland). Growth Point status was awarded in July 2008 and £20m funding proposed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to have accelerated, additional and at the same time more sustainable housing growth.

This means on top of the 120,000 new homes allocated in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS; 2004-2021), 60,000 additional homes are proposed to be built by 2016. This may potentially have a negative accumulated impact, such as habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity, more noise, problems with future water supply or unsustainable transport patterns. To avoid this Growth Points have been asked to carry out some key environmental surveys and strategies. This includes the development of a Green Infrastructure strategy.

The first Green Infrastructure strategy in the North East was developed for the Tees Valley in 2008 ahead of the Growth Point announcement and is seen as good practice for this spatial scale.

Many other Local Authorities are now following this approach and are producing strategies at the local level (for example Stockton, Sunderland, Hartlepool and South Tyneside) with others expressing the ambition to follow suit. It is expected that by 2011 the whole of the North East region will be covered.

For more information contact:

Dr Ingo Schüder , Green Infrastructure Delivery Leader, Natural England North East, The Quadrant, Newburn Riverside, Newcastle NE15 8NZ , phone 0300 060 0940 or email: Ingo.Schuder@naturalengland.org.uk

Natural England's contribution:

- Initiated and funded a number of exemplary green space creation projects in recent years, including Ashington Community Woodland; Northumberland Park green link corridor; St Lawrence Park, Byker; West Park, Darlington; Tees Heritage Park, Stockton; Seaton Deleval Hall, Northumberland; The Dilly Line, Gateshead.
- Was instrumental in creating a post for a Green Infrastructure implementation post in the Tees Valley
- Gives specialist advice to Local Authorities developing and implementing Green Infrastructure strategies
- Takes a strategic role in promoting Green Infrastructure in the North East, such as the North East regional Green Infrastructure conference in October 2009 and also through partnership projects.

Useful Links:

Green Infrastructure in the North East:

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/north_east/ourwork/green_infrastructure.aspx

Green Infrastructure Natural England main webpage:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/planningtransportlocalgov/greeninfrastructure/default.aspx>

Natural England position on Housing Growth and Green Infrastructure:

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/housing-position_tcm6-14794.pdf

Economic Value of Green Infrastructure

www.nwda.co.uk/pdf/EconomicValueofGreenInfrastructure.pdf