GREENSPACES
Advisory Board

GSAB Green Space

Stewardship model





GREENSPACES
Advisory Board

Producing this model has only been possible thanks to the support and contribution from so many people across social housing, charities, housebuilders and environmental organisations. Hundreds of people have been involved in building this model and so it would be impossible to thank everyone.

Many people have helped us by sharing their ideas, successes and lessons. These include –

Residents from Notting Hill Genesis and SNG (Sovereign Network Group); Gemma Jerome, Building with Nature; Ricky Dallow, Severn Trent Water; Micha Joseph, L&Q; Corinne Daley, SNG; Ed Stannard, Parks for London; Lee Heykoop, Homes England; Ian Jelley, Wildlife Trust; John Daley, Magenta; Amanda-Jayne Doherty, Peabody; Caroline Nolan, NHG; Catherine Cannell, Thirteen Group; Ben James, Moat; Anthony Barron, Thakeham Group; Carly Woodbridge, Clarion; Steph Quinn, Futures; Jessica Marshall, Orbit; Sam Granger, Thirteen Group; Libby Kerman, Lincolnshire Housing Partnership; Dylan Byrne, Field Studies Council; James Dial, Futures; Tim Goodwin, SNG; Leila Musa, SNG; Luke Simmons, Cora; Claire Blacka, Home Group; Howard Goodall, NHG; Claire Vokins, ECGardening; Jess Tasney, Sanctuary; Janene Haywood, Futures, Sarah Mitton, Clarion; Andy Lyon, Clarion; Gareth Banks, Magna; Caroline Nolan, NHG; Jonny Watson, Home Group, Denys Nash, Riverside; Paul White, Home Group; David Wadsworth, Futures; Daniel Salliss, Flagship; Colleen Eccles, Sanctuary; Richard Lupo, SHIFT; James Williams, HACT and Tessa Barraclough, Riverside.

We would also like to thank colleagues at Unlock Next Gen, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Future Homes Consortium for their help in critically reviewing the model.

Orbit have kindly allowed us to use their habitat condition assessment tool that they developed in partnership with the Wildlife Trusts. It is the sharing and collaboration between us that help us to achieve more and so thank you.

A particular thank you must go to Ground Control for helping development and asset management colleagues to bridge the gap between placemaking, planning and development. And, for sponsoring the Green Space Advisory Board who have led the production of this model. The technical contribution from Ground Control has been invaluable.

Lastly, a huge thank you to the Green Space Advisory Board members who have spent considerable time and effort researching and writing the model, without them this would not have been possible.

Ria Bailes
Chair of Green Spaces Advisory Board

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Foreword

From January 2024 it is mandatory for all new developments (except small sites) requiring planning permission to deliver a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG). Small sites will be required to deliver BNG by April 2024. Some local authorities are already going further than this, for example Cambridge asking for a 20% net gain. The Environment Act 2021 includes a legally binding target on species abundance for 2030. It includes water targets to help tackle pollution and has introduced the mandatory biodiversity net gain for built developments.

Over eight in ten people (86%) said that protecting the environment was important to them and 'the environment / climate change' was the third most commonly selected issue facing the UK (chosen by 29% of people), after 'Health/ the NHS/ Coronavirus' (52%) and 'the rising cost of living' (30%) in 2022.[1]

In 2022, the WWF reported that humanity has wiped out almost 70% of wildlife populations since 1970.
And, as Ground Control identified in its 2022 Time to Act report[2], Britain now has just 53% of its preindustrial natural wildlife and fauna – placing it in the bottom 10 percent of countries globally for biodiversity. "The world is waking up to the fact that our future depends on reversing the loss of nature just as much as it depends on addressing climate change. And you can't solve one without solving the other," says Carter Roberts, president and CEO of WWF-US. "Everyone has a role to play in reversing these trends, from individuals to companies to governments."

Yet, in the hustle and bustle of our modern lives, it is easy to overlook the profound impact that green spaces can have on our planet, our communities, and individual well-being. It is crucial that we recognise the immense potential these spaces hold. The time has come for social landlords to reimagine and reinvent the way we approach green spaces, harnessing their power to transform our communities for the better.

Social landlords work in some of the most disadvantaged communities, and we know that outdoor space can have a huge effect on the lives of social housing residents. There is an extensive body of evidence that links health and wellbeing to access to quality green spaces. According to Natural England's Year 2 Annual Report (2021-22)[3] 94% of adults who had visited a green and natural space in the previous 14 days agreed that spending time outdoors was good for their physical health and 92% agreed it was also good for their mental health.

The article 'Nearby Nature' by Wells & Evans[4], reported that children who move to housing with greener views have been shown to have improved attention capacity. Further research identified that the impact of stress-related life events for children, such as moving home, being picked on or punished at school, or experiencing peer pressure were reduced more for children with vegetation close to home.

For 50 years, Ground Control has been caring for the UK's green spaces, bringing forward sustainable landscape design and stewardship solutions for many of the country's most recognised public and private sector landowners in pursuit of our mission to invest in, enhance, and protect our environment. And so, we're working in partnership with housing providers, helping in-house development and asset management teams to take practical steps to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain, maximise return on investment in green assets, and help residents to reap the benefits of reconnection to the natural world.

From entirely new landscape schemes that deliver significant biodiversity uplift, to retrofitted urban greening enhancements, we are providing the independent end-to-end support housing associations need to ensure outdoor communal spaces become part of the answer to arrest the dual environment and mental health emergencies.

Within the following pages, you will embark on a journey that will inspire you to invest in improving green spaces. This comprehensive model has been meticulously crafted to guide you on a path toward creating green spaces that are not only ecologically beneficial but also socially and economically rewarding. It presents a roadmap - a blueprint for a future where green spaces flourish, nurturing our planet, enhancing our communities, and bolstering our financial prosperity.

1 - The People & Nature Survey for England: Year 2 Annual Report https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-year-2-annual-report-data-and-publications-april-2021-march-2022-official-statistics-main-findings/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-year-2-annual-report-data-and-publications-april-2021-march-2022-official-statistics-main-findings#importance-of-nature-for-peoples-wellbeing

2 - Time to Act: Ground Control (and partners) Biodiversity Action Report https://ground-control-web.euwest01.umbraco.io/media/qyqa-pvsm/time-to-act-why-business-must-step-up-to-address-the-biodiversity-crisis.pdf

3 - The People & Nature Survey for England: Year 2 Annual Report https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-year-2-annual-report-data-and-publications-april-2021-march-2022-official-statistics-main-findings/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-year-2-annual-report-data-and-publications-april-2021-march-2022-official-statistics-main-findings#importance-of-nature-for-peoples-wellbeing

4 - Wells, N. and Evans, G. W. (2003) Nearby Nature: A buffer of life stress among rural children, Environment and Behavior, 35: 311–330.





The chapters that follow will take you through the fundamental elements of this process.
We talk about engaging with your communities, empowering individuals and fostering a sense of ownership over green spaces. By understanding the case for using green spaces wisely, we have no doubt you will agree with us that they have a vital role in mitigating environmental challenges, enhancing public health, and promoting social cohesion.

Through benchmarking, you will gain insights into the current state of your green spaces, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Armed with this knowledge, you will then be guided to create a well-crafted plan - an actionable roadmap that will serve as the cornerstone of your green space endeavours.

But transforming aspirations into reality cannot be achieved alone. Collaboration and partnership will be key. We encourage you to forge alliances, uniting like-minded individuals and organisations, and securing the necessary funding to bring your vision to life.

As you dive into the chapter on implementation, you will learn how to turn plans into tangible, lasting change. From planting native trees and vegetation to incorporating sustainable design elements, you will uncover a wealth of practical insights that will help you to create vibrant and resilient green spaces.

And, of course, no journey is complete without reflection. Evaluation plays a crucial role in measuring progress, adapting strategies, and celebrating achievements.
We look at some of the tools and approaches necessary to evaluate the impact of your green space initiatives, ensuring that you are continuously evolving and improving.

Throughout this model, you will be inspired by success stories of individuals and communities who have embraced using green spaces better and transformed their surroundings. Their stories will serve as a reminder that change is possible, and that every effort, no matter how small, contributes to a greater collective purpose.

Together, let's unleash the potential of green spaces to heal our planet, connect our communities, and yield economic prosperity. The power to make a difference lies within each and every one of us. Our green spaces are not just patches of land; they are the lifeblood of our world. It is time to invest in their future - for the planet and for the next generations to come.



Kim Morrish
Director
Ground Control

Your green guide

Unsure of where to go for more information or help? Click the handy 'Your Green Guide' buttons throughout the document.

To learn more about how to achieve biodiversity net gain through habitat design and landscape maintenance, click Your Green Guide below.

Your green guide

The blockers to building nature's recovery[1]

Personal feeling vs business action

82%



say the issue of biodiversity is very important to them on a personal level

12%



are investing in biodiversity projects undertaken by third parties

14%



have implemented strategies to make their land more biodiverse

Commitment to change

43%



have committed their business to environmental strategies now or in the future, to lessen their impact on the environment

50%



have already reduced energy consumption

42%



use more sustainable products in production

While business leaders personally care about biodiversity, and believe that other businesses have the finances and resources to do more, they aren't yet doing so in their own businesses. In the rest of this report we will seek to discover why, and what else they can do in future.

Do businesses feel the can help biodiversity?

43%



don't think business have had a positive impact on stopping biodiversity loss to date

84%



believe that they have the resources including finance, innovative thinking, people and time, to make a positive impact

83%



say businesses could do more to have a positive impact in future

Are they using resources in the right way?

27%



use renewable energy

26%



have committed to using more sustainable methods in the supply chain such as using electric vehicles

25%



are volunteering staff on local sustainability projects

1 - https://ground-control-web.euwest01.umbraco.io/media/qyqapvsm/time-to-act-why-business-must-step-up-to-address-the-biodiversity-crisis.pdf

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1. Introduction

As a social landlord you have a unique opportunity to positively impact the lives of your residents and the surrounding communities through the thoughtful management and utilisation of green spaces. These spaces, whether they are parks, gardens, or communal outdoor spaces, hold immense potential to foster community cohesion, enhance well-being, and promote sustainable living. This comprehensive model aims to provide you with valuable insights and actionable steps to maximise the potential of your green spaces.

Green spaces offer far more than just aesthetics; they serve as essential hubs for social interactions, recreational activities, and environmental preservation. By carefully designing, maintaining, and engaging with these spaces, you can create environments that encourage residents to connect with nature, form bonds with their neighbours, and experience an improved quality of life and positive effect on mental health[1].

Throughout this guide, we will explore various strategies that will help you enhance the value of your green spaces, ensuring they become true catalysts for positive change. From fostering biodiversity and restoring local ecosystems to designing inclusive and accessible recreational facilities, you will discover the many dimensions that contribute to making green spaces truly thriving centres of community life.

The model takes you through seven chapters, from building the case for using green spaces well and engaging with your communities, to the implementation of your plans and evaluating these. Each chapter takes you through key principles, the steps you need to take, what hurdles you might expect and tips to take away. We have compiled further reading and more tools if you want to dive deeper into the detail. These can be found on our webpage. But for now, we hope you enjoy reading the model and it helps you to make a real difference to your green spaces.

1 - https://www.ground-control.co.uk/insights/blog/making-the-world-inclusive-for-people-suffering-from-post-natal-depression/



Definitions we have used:

Net Zero: a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions produced by human activity as much as possible and then implementing measures that absorb those residual emissions that cannot be reduced.

Biodiversity: all the different kinds of life you'll find in one area - the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): is a strategy to develop land and contribute to the recovery of nature. It is a way of making sure the habitat for wildlife is in a better state than it was before development.

GIS data: A geographic information system (GIS) is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyse, manage, and present all types of geographical data.

Social value: a concept that refers to the positive impact that business and public services can have on the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the environment.

ESG/ESHG: an abbreviation for environmental, social, and governance (health is increasingly being added to form ESHG); a way of judging a company by things other than its financial performance, for example its social impact, policies relating to the environment and how happy its employees are.

SRS: an abbreviation for sustainability reporting standards. Certain entities are covered by sustainability reporting requirements. In 2020 The Sustainability Reporting Standard for Social Housing was launched to help attract ESG investments and ultimately boost the supply of new genuinely affordable homes. The Standard brings consensus on how to measure and report on ESG performance in the social housing sector.

Green infrastructure: a network of green spaces including playing fields, woodlands, street trees, allotments, green roofs and other natural elements. It also includes rivers, streams and lakes often referred to as blue infrastructure.

Green space: a vegetated land area maintained for recreation and community enjoyment. This may include (but is not limited to) parks, community gardens, informal recreational spaces, provision for children and teenagers, allotments and food growing sites, outdoor sports facilities, green corridors, woodlands, grasslands and wetlands and civic spaces.

Open space: all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a community amenity.

Nutrient neutrality: a means of ensuring that a development plan or project does not add to existing nutrient burdens within water catchments, so there is no net increase in nutrients as a result of the plan or project.

2. Green spaces roadmap



3. The case of using green spaces well

“

Working in green spaces not only has positive benefits for the local environment and people living around it but can also be an activity for some people recovering from trauma to help get their lives back on track. I’ve seen many people facing mental health issues gain confidence, knowledge and experience through immersing themselves in nature and learning horticultural skills, sometimes leading to employed work as well as better mental health. Social landlords could really help people by including multi-use green spaces and creating networks to help people.



Claire Vokins
former Chair of Veterans’ Growth and
professional horticulturist

“

At St Mungo’s we’ve been running a therapeutic horticulture programme for people who’ve experienced homelessness for almost 25 years. Gardening, and being in nature, teaches us mindfulness, patience, and resilience. It also instils pride and hope – which are vitally important to a person’s wellbeing and recovery. Learning to nurture plants helps people to learn to nurture themselves, and there is a powerful parallel between the growth and development of plants and the growth and development of people. Gardens provide a safe space for social interaction, and the provision and management of shared green space can provide a valuable sense of belonging and community to our clients. Any social landlords interested in supporting people to recover from homelessness or in seeing their residents and communities grows should read this toolkit carefully.



Matt Woodruff
Horticultural Skills Manager, St Mungo’s
Putting Down Roots Programme

“

This is a great initiative. High quality green spaces reduce health inequalities and mitigate climate change. It’s great to see leading housing associations focused on this, as we know social housing residents typically experience greater health inequity than the general population. Supporting approaches like this is fundamental to Legal & General’s approach to inclusive capitalism: investing to the benefit of those whose pensions and savings we steward and creating places and communities where people can thrive.



Pete Gladwell
Group Social Impact & Investment
Director, Legal & General

“

The housing sector has a unique opportunity to join the dots between nature recovery and people’s wellbeing, by using green spaces well and ensuring that both existing and new build communities maximise the benefits of parkland, woodland, verges, scrubland, gardens, lakes and canals. At Ground Control we’re seeing social housing partners maximising the potential of green space. Successfully moving the sustainability agenda beyond housing stock to the vast areas of open space we can bring to bear for carbon capture, nature’s recovery and resident wellbeing. The key is early and meaningful green space consultation with residents. This really helps social landlords create high quality green space that meets the aspirations and needs of local people and encourages new voices from the younger generation of green champions.



Matt Goddard
Head of Landscape Architecture,
Ground Control



Unfortunately, not everyone is fully bought into investing in green spaces and we know that the external operating environment for social landlords continues to be challenging. Despite the pressures faced, we need to do more to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss and pollution. Our colleagues, residents and investors agree. Orbit's research reported 92% of 900 customers felt it was important or very important that they had access to high quality green spaces within less than ten minutes of their home.

This is a key dilemma facing all social landlords; how to enhance our green spaces when resources are constrained and scrutiny is greater than ever. In response to this challenge, the Green Spaces Advisory Board and its partners have created a roadmap - demonstrating how a typical social landlord can enhance, protect and restore its green spaces for nature and people. The Green Spaces Model sets out six milestones covering a range of activities already familiar to social landlords.

Our research clearly found that there are many opportunities for social landlords to play their role in reversing the loss of nature while at the same time making green spaces work better for residents. Many organisations have targets and plans in place to reduce carbon emissions but often see the carbon reduction as the single response needed to tackle climate change. Restoring and enhancing nature has a vital role to play in addressing the climate and nature emergency with multifaceted direct and indirect benefits, including resilience to climate change, improvements to staff and residents physical and mental health and wellbeing, improvements to air quality and many more. Combined with the good governance and purpose that most social landlords are fundamentally focused on, it offers the chance to address all components of what leading investors want in terms of Environmental, Social, Governance (and more recently Health) impacts.



Why wouldn't all social landlords want to get on board with improving their green spaces?

Our research identified three primary barriers to social landlords doing more in relation to biodiversity.

These were:
Capacity: simply lacking the headspace to take on additional issues in the face of the unprecedented challenges facing the sector.

Costs: with income capped and inflation and increased expectations driving up our cost base, social landlords – as well as residents facing rapidly rising cost-of-living – simply cannot afford to spend more in this area.

Resources: some of this requires new skills not in our workforces and where we do have skills, internal expertise is already stretched.

The Green Spaces Model shows how each of these barriers can be overcome by adapting existing business practices to develop the skills and processes needed.

Capacity: the milestone steps show how existing approaches to planning, building partnerships and resident engagement (all of which are traditional areas for social landlords) can be used to create excellent green spaces.

Costs: Ground Control are proud to have been part of the Green Spaces Advisory Board bringing their expertise in environmental stewardship since 1973. As part of the work for this model, Ground Control have developed a green spaces assessment framework which can review urban, suburban and rural typology, to plan higher quality green spaces that can be managed within the same cost as a 'traditional' approach to grounds maintenance so that there is no net increase in service charges.

Resources: fundamentally, social landlords are already doing grounds maintenance and have to keep on doing so. The opportunities to collaborate and learn from others across the sector enabled by this model will enable stretched internal resources to do more, in a more effective way. We have a chapter on partnerships and throughout the model we encourage readers to think about how they use procurement to plug skills gaps and deliver greater value for money.

The Green Space Model offers the opportunity for social landlords to build on their fundamental purpose and responsibilities by making green spaces better for the benefit of residents and communities more widely. We don't want to simply greenwash our image, but instead support a positive, sustainable vision of the benefits that social housing can deliver in an authentic and collaborative manner.

We know colleagues across the social landlord sector are massively motivated by our purpose – aligning our environmental, social, health and governance efforts with this will multiply the rewards. The environmental and health benefits to residents are clear. Taking both together the sector can make great leaps in its appeal to investors.



Creating your own business case for your organisation

Creating a clear, evidenced and inspiring business case will result in increased buy-in from all stakeholders, a more considered design and a more sustainable long-term solution for your green spaces. As well as using the reasons set out above, you can develop specific reasons to influence internal stakeholders in your organisation.

Key steps to do this are:

1 The business case can bring a structured approach to mitigate mandatory planning and management requirements. For example biodiversity net gain, Schedule 3 of the Flood Management Act (SuDS), urban greening factor.

2 Highlight that biodiversity gain can often lead to reduced service charges if done well.

3 Link improvement to the cost of living, fuel poverty, health agendas and pulling out the wider benefits is a useful tool to get traction.

4 When developing the program, financial input is often the biggest driver. Use qualitative examples to strengthen the case e.g. good health saves money whereas bad health is costly.

5 Use external examples from successful programmes or forecast to estimate financial saving. Think beyond obvious savings such as the health (physical and mental) benefits, which will have a wider affect across the services. For example, better mental health may reduce housing officer visits.

6 Highlight how effective green spaces and biodiversity projects can be to engage and bring customers together to discuss multiple topics.

7 Look at where there is overlap or 'force multipliers' for example using nature as a gateway to talk about sustainability on a broader scale.

8 Consider land not developed or under management. Does this present a strong business case for gains?

9 Consider the income generation or cost mitigation opportunities presented from emerging natural capital markets such as habitat banks for biodiversity, nutrients and carbon.

10 Consider the current and future alignment to governance frameworks such as the SRS, Taskforce for Nature-related Finance Disclosures (TNFD) or individual sustainability finance frameworks.

4. Milestones

The green space model is not intended to be applied rigidly - it's been designed to enable social landlords to implement the principles (or activities) in a relevant and proportionate way that works best for their organisation. You are likely to take a much lighter approach to a small piece of land with a small budget and a much more in-depth approach to a larger area which is receiving grant funding and needs to deliver against performance indicators.

Many social landlords may want to develop their approach across one or several areas initially before using learnings to roll-out changes out more widely. The estates and green spaces we manage are varied, offering different opportunities for resident participation - with some areas being able to sustain greater active resident involvement. Wherever we choose to start, we recognise that our first projects will help us better understand options for improvement, and the processes and resources we can use to scale-up our approach.

Milestone #1:
Engaging with our communities

Create meaningful engagement with a diverse group of residents to understand the aspirations and needs of local people in tandem with the requirement of wildlife and ecosystem.

Your green guide

Introduction

There will be opportunities to engage with the broad range of stakeholders at multiple stages when making changes to your green spaces and enhancing their value. We focus solely on resident engagement in this section, however we recommend that you think about the various stakeholders you should involve and at what points along the way.



Key points

We all know that the key benefits of good engagement are shaping and developing services in a way that improves outcomes and builds positive relationships with residents and communities. We recommend that you consider two key questions when engaging with your communities:

1. **What residents want from the green spaces they use.**
2. **How to continue to engage with communities on the green space they use.**

How you go about finding out the answers to these questions will depend on your organisation and your approach to engaging with your communities. We centre on three principles of meaningful engagement with communities and recommend you translate these to whatever is relevant and proportionate for what you are trying to achieve.

1. **How to engage with a diverse resident base.**
2. **How to manage competing priorities.**
3. **How to support residents to create legacy and a long-term stake in their community green spaces.**

Key steps

1. Engaging with a diverse resident base

Who?

Understanding your audience and who you are engaging with is a good starting point, including trying to understand why some people don't want to be involved. We suggest that you think about how you can reach people relevant for the green spaces you are working with – your ordinary methods might not be appropriate for this sort of engagement. Customer segmentation using information you hold on residents and properties can help understand our green space users and you can then tailor your approach. For example, young people who may not always have access to a forum to take a lead, share ideas or raise their awareness. Engaging locally either through community ambassadors or on the ground at an estate level can result in good outcomes. Think about accessibility for older people and residents where English is not their first language. It's also useful to look at other local groups that you can tap into e.g., youth boards, activists or volunteers, eco-schools or eco-hubs. Engaging with local schools, scouts/guide groups and youth forums is also a way to engage your younger residents. Local eco-hub volunteers have community surveys that can be shared and acted on. They can also support volunteer days and resident events. It's important to build space for all residents and consider physical as well as mental accessibility.

An example process of designing for local people





Skills and resources

It's crucial to ensure that residents have the skills and resources needed to ensure that engagement is inclusive. This may include creating different types of events eg in-person, or online. An equitable approach to engagement is only possible when barriers are removed. For example, financial support may need to be considered to help people to engage with any initiatives and putting on events at certain times of the day may present a barrier to some people. Supporting residents to increase skills in this area does not need to cost money.

There are local organisations that offer free horticultural services which residents can benefit from. Skills for residents can also be provided in contractor social or sustainability commitments eg providing apprenticeships, courses, biodiversity enhancements, workshops for residents. You could liaise with schools, colleges and other partners for work experience and trainee opportunities and encourage businesses to support or sponsor green projects, training, equipment and funding to offset their emissions.

There will be great examples of using local groups to support community groups all around you. The Conservation Volunteers Green Gym sponsored by Camden Council is one example.
Camden Green Gym | TCV

Woodhouse Urban Park is another example. It is an important component in the regeneration of South Kilburn. Thanks to Ground Control's meaningful engagement with the South Kilburn Trust Group in the early development stages, and the new Friends of Woodhouse Urban Park group who take ownership, the community space has transformed the area, creating a real sense of place and a better place to live.
Woodhouse Urban Park | Ground Control



Communication

Language is key to engaging people. Terms like 'natural history' carry a certain weight and stigma. Even words like nature can feel exclusive as people have different views of what 'nature' is. Language is important in diverse communities.

Our experience shows that, for example, the word volunteering to some communities can mean conscription; community improvement days can speak more to the benefits and improve engagement. Also think about internal communication within your organisation. Reaching out to willing colleagues to volunteer in working groups and sourcing historical projects, good practice and previous successful engagement works to ensure success.

Tips to communicating about green spaces:

Be conscious and considered about the words you use and test these out with others to get their perspectives.

Recognition of cultural aspects of gardening and how we garden differently for example gardening for aesthetics or gardening for production is a useful narrative to play with.

Avoiding jargon, you can use visuals like Ron Finley (https://ronfinley.com/) and storytelling to show the benefits. Gangster Gardener can inspire others, as can case studies. Using a variety of different ways to communicate will get more people involved.

Know your audience - children tend to love nature and the outdoors at a young age. Involving different generations and family members is a good way to reach more people. Have a look at how someone like Marcellus Baz works with young people.

Putting some thought into the narrative can help to make the subject more meaningful and exciting. Food for example can be something that people can revolve around, or tangible topics such as colour, grow you own or healthy living.

Exploring the potential of playful yet biodiverse landscapes to engage the younger generation or using pictures, or giving people the opportunity to look, smell and feel can all contribute to a strong narrative.

Sensory gardens have been proven to reduce anti-social behaviours and to enhance the lives of people with additional educational needs and the elderly.

Linking the benefits of green spaces to mental health and wellbeing is a message that most people understand and can relate to.

Remember, using one approach to engagement is unlikely to work or reach everyone – mix up your engagement methods to ensure that participation is community-wide and inclusive.

At Urban & Civic's Waterbeach Barracks in Cambridgeshire apprentices, local employment groups and schools, are brought together with inclusive programmes linking the benefits of modern housing that integrates with green spaces, sustainable transport and community living, allowing people and nature to flourish.
Urban&Civic | Ground Control

2. Managing competing priorities

Costs

Engagement often takes time and costs money and usually neither of these resources are adequately accounted for. There will always need to be initial investment from somewhere, not only for the ‘doing’ of the work, but for those who need to come on board to help form the programmes eg external consultants (horticulturalists and biodiversity experts etc). The financial investment could come from external investors via ESG (environmental, social and governance) schemes, but also from current existing budgets.

Use as much ‘free’ assistance as possible. Local community groups and halls or your own community buildings can be used for consultation meetings. Use the local police Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) for advice about ‘secure by design’, will help you and ensure that the spaces you are creating are as safe as possible. When building your business case, benchmarking your space and creating your plan, think about the costs involved and how you might be able to fund these through creative solutions.



Use of the space

Managing expectations upfront can help residents to understand the scope of resources available. Every community will have different views on how best to use green spaces. This extends beyond just residents. Other groups of people must buy-in to how the green space will be used, from contractors to colleagues. Everyone involved is a source of information.

Keeping things simple is a good approach to start with. Use existing services, processes and ways of communicating eg sending out packs as part of new tenancies. Think about who will be interacting with residents - will it be housing officers, estate management teams or regeneration colleagues for example? On larger estates you may be able to include green space plans in annual management plans and resident board discussions if you have these. Different approaches are likely to be needed for smaller areas and street homes however. Whatever frameworks you can use, we encourage you to think about how to bring in a collaborative way of managing your green spaces and estates.

Inevitably at some point you face the risk of managing competing priorities regarding how residents may want to use the space, what is environmentally best for the space and financial constraints. Our advice is to stay true to your organisation’s vision and objectives. We recommend that you implement a sustainability strategy that sets out your vision and role that you will play in environmental sustainability as a social landlord.



3. Supporting residents to have a long-term stake in green spaces.

It’s important to bring people on the journey. This can be achieved by connecting the dots between how spaces can make a difference to residents as well as resolving challenges such as anti-social behaviour.

Where space needs to be managed, and where it is possible for resident management, we suggest that you develop self-managing local groups to help you as quickly as possible. You will need to consider to what degree people could self-manage the spaces. In passing some responsibility to residents you are creating ownership. People are more likely to look after a space when they feel part of the leadership team. Creating a charter for residents and the housing provider can help with this.

Inclusivity, equity, protected characteristics; all need to be noted and respected, given time and space. Different countries view outdoor space in different ways. In the UK we have often been taught about formal gardening and perfect aesthetics, whereas other cultures may consider growing food to be a more valuable way of using green space. Older people might expect neatness and weedkillers, whereas children may think differently.

Programmes don’t happen overnight; they can take years to develop. So generational buy-in is important. Some of this will depend on the behaviour of your residents. Are they lifetime residents or do new residents move into the area more regularly?

Look to design for the future. Consider the changing needs of communities and the requirement to mitigate against the impact of climate change including, flooding and surface run off, air pollution, poor water quality, and the urban heat island effect.

For example, tree canopies can be helpful in the summer for shade. Senior Landscape Architect at Ground Control, Chris Chippendale, shared evidence of a 10% decrease in street temperatures following increased tree planting. We are seeing overheating becoming more common, especially in urban areas. This can have a terrible impact on vulnerable people with increased risk of serious harm. Trees are also proven to improve the winter environment, as the roots create pavement warmth and reduce the requirement for salting.

Alongside increased tree canopy cover, sustainable urban drainage (SUDs) and wildlife rich water bodies, wildlife friendly planting, and green rooftops and walls all have an important and interconnected role to play in nature recovery and increased climate resilience within our green spaces.

Overall, many people are very aware of the climate issues and most people understand that work needs to be done. It’s the linking of personal benefit to the work that will be the key. Share the concern to protect residents’ homes and future generations in an easy to understand, digestible way.

Tips to success

Hurdles	Solutions
Specialist knowledge required to make green spaces a success	We advocate engaging specialists who understand how plants develop, what mess they may make, which are poisonous to animals etc. Equally these specialists need to understand the local area, its uniqueness and the financial implications of their recommendations. There is no single answer to using our spaces better. Much of this work is contracted-out so procurement is important. Not every grounds maintenance contractor has the level of expertise we need to use our green spaces to best effect.
Resistance to change	There is likely to be a lot of 'unlearning' to take place. You will hear "but we used to do it that way" a lot. Invest time in helping people to see different and new ways of doing things by presenting the benefits first. It's helpful to enlist the support of residents who are already bought into the change to influence others.
Risk	Contractors and repair teams will look to insurance companies for guidance on matters such as trees near homes, root issues etc. Highlighting legal responsibilities with regards to health and safety and the environment, and the implications of not adhering to it will be a useful tool to support any arguments.
The space becomes unloved after the initial excitement wears off	Climate change and nature recovery has a high profile in society thanks to the gathering movement raising its importance. Most people realise that we all have more to learn and therefore the education, co-design and ongoing conversation about our outdoor spaces needs to continue together with colleagues and residents. Use your resident engagement channels and governance frameworks to keep it alive. This includes positive stories about service charge neutrality or lowering as a result of better design and maintenance.



See the **tools, sources and case studies** that we recommend you look at relating to engaging with your communities.

Milestone #2: Benchmarking

Benchmark individual green assets. Discover how to catalogue function, location, size, existing habitat condition, and use of green space to ensure that enhancements deliver meaningful environmental, economic and societal value.

Click on the link below and go to Green Spaces Advisory Board section to find the tool.



Introduction

Benchmarking is important because, put quite simply, you need to know what you have and what state it is in. This allows you then to:

1. Have a starting point from which we can set targets, design improvements and evaluate how well we are doing.
2. Inform the business case for strategies and individual site improvements.
3. Support access to grants and sustainable finance.
4. Build trust in leaders and communities that long-term performance will be monitored.
5. Identify lessons to be learned that informs improvements to your programme.

Key points

In this section, we will give you an introduction to benchmarking green spaces and how this can be used to improve green spaces and monitor them over time. The information below takes you through the key steps of benchmarking your green spaces:

1. **How to get started**
2. **Environmental benchmarking**
3. **Social benchmarking**
4. **Economic benchmarking**

Definitions

Benchmarking can be used to assess the current condition of one or more green spaces, their maintenance costs and the value offered to residents. This can be used to design and develop a business case for improvements.

Monitoring all the different kinds of life you'll find in one area - the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world.

1. Getting started

The first thing you will need to do when looking to set out a benchmarking approach is to be clear on what you are trying to achieve and the audience for your benchmarking results. You might want to think about the following:

Prompt	Considerations
What are the major drivers for your organisation to improve its outdoor spaces?	■ Is your organisation focused on enhancing access to nature, or promoting greater health and wellbeing for residents? ■ Look at your company vision and objectives. ■ If you already have a published sustainability strategy then consider what metrics have already been identified that you can use for your project. ■ Reach out to others in your organisation or the wider sector for support when you need it.
What is the scope of your project? A single site or a whole organisation?	■ A single site will allow you to commit more time and resources, perhaps capturing a greater variety of metrics. ■ Larger projects will require careful selection of critical metrics that can be captured across multiple sites. ■ Larger projects covering different areas and capturing various types of estate or community may also provide more representation across your properties, making it easier to replicate afterwards.
What data do you already have readily to hand?	■ What resident surveys have you done that may provide insight into the use and perception of green spaces? ■ Do you have GIS data to support your plans?
Who are your key stakeholders?	■ A wide network of supporters across key teams such as estates, property management and data will support your benchmarking efforts.
How much resource do you have available to you?	■ Resources will determine the ambition and scope of your benchmarking. Fewer resources may reduce the range of metrics captured or reduce sample sizes.

However you decide to benchmark, we recommend you consider all three elements of sustainability and keep it relevant and proportionate based on what you have ascertained from the above:

- **Environmental**
- **Social**
- **Economic.**

2. Environmental benchmarking

Improving our green spaces from an environmental perspective involves increasing the variety of wildlife species - referred to as biodiversity - as well as other nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change, for example flooding and using plants to improve air quality. We have mainly focused on biodiversity in this section for which there are a range of ways for us to measure this from in-depth ecological surveys to a habitat condition survey.

Habitat surveys look at the different kind of habitats in an area such as grassland and woodland, the amount of space they take up and the quality. Species surveys go into more detail looking to identify all key species in an area and/or the potential for specific species. This requires much more technical expertise and need to be carried out at different times of the year.

We recommend that most practitioners follow a habitat-based approach so that resources can be focused on improvement rather than measurement. There will be exceptions however, particularly for new build developments where a high degree of accuracy is required to meet the requirements around Biodiversity Net Gain. It takes around an hour to assess the green space you want to focus on.

When considering habitat condition, it is also important to consider the presence and quality of green spaces outside the boundaries of your organisation's own land. This is because a key principle of green space improvement is that of connectivity. The idea here is that habitats are higher quality and likely to be more biodiverse when they are connected to other green spaces. This can include parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, street trees, allotments, private gardens, green roofs and walls and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS).



Here is a link to the habitat condition assessment tool developed by Orbit and the Wildlife Trusts that you can use (go to GSAB section to find it).



Who should carry out the habitat condition survey?

We think this provides a great opportunity for colleagues and residents to get involved in green spaces. Consider the following when taking this approach:

- Provide a clear narrative when recruiting for habitat survey volunteers. What will they gain from participating and from the potential improvements to the green space?
- What training will you give them? This will be key to ensuring good engagement and consistency across the surveys.
- Would a campaign help to raise awareness and get involvement? You could do a big in-person event or a digital campaign depending on the geography of your project.
- What technology might be available to support you? Could you use an app or simple online form to support the collection of data? There are plenty of apps available such as Leaf Snap.

When should habitat surveys take place?

It is strongly recommended that visits are conducted during the day in spring or summer. This is when the condition of habitats on your outdoor spaces will be most visible. It will be too difficult for non-experts to assess species when they are dormant during the winter months.

The importance of mapping data

The key data required to inform both the ecological and habitat condition surveys can be mapped using a variety of methods if a GIS mapping tool is not available. This will allow those completing the survey to record their findings and determine the areas that correlate with different habitats and species locations. Most social housing providers will have this data in one form or another as it is often used to determine grounds maintenance contracts and the subsequent allocation of service charge to customers. There are a range of asset management and more specialist ecological software applications that can host this data for you.



Case study: Orbit's habitat-based approach

Orbit formed a two-year partnership with the Wildlife Trusts to set out a long-term approach to biodiversity. In June 2022, it published its commitment to be managing 30% of all outdoor green spaces for nature's recovery by 2030. This was underpinned by a new benchmarking approach developed during this partnership.

Referring back to our prompts from earlier in this section, Orbit had the following considerations:

Drivers: Customer research had revealed that green spaces were a key area of environmental interest. As such, biodiversity was included as one of three priorities in their 'Orbit Earth' environmental programme. There was a requirement to set a long-term target and measure performance to demonstrate actions being taken in this area.

Scope: Orbit has many hundreds of green spaces varying from a strip of lawn to large-scale recreational spaces. The benchmarking needed to be scalable across this whole portfolio.

Data: GIS data is a real strength at Orbit and was readily available. It included some limited green space categorisation in support of grounds maintenance contracts though data quality was variable.

Stakeholders: There was already an Orbit Earth Steering Group that was able to generate support and volunteers to participate in the benchmarking. This later evolved into a project team consisting of members of sustainability, estates, property management and grounds maintenance contractor colleagues.

Resource: Most budget was reserved for capital expenditure on the improvements themselves. Benchmarking would need to be completed by the sustainability team and a network of champions.

Based on these considerations, it was decided that the habitat condition survey approach was the most scalable option that would allow a group-wide target to be set and monitored. Orbit worked with the Wildlife Trusts to develop a simple tool that split a given outdoor space into different areas. Each area was assigned a habitat type and condition that determined whether an area was supporting nature's recovery or not. In essence, diverse habitats such as mixed-species hedgerows, woodland and wildflower meadows would qualify, whereas areas of predominantly grass would not.

The robust GIS data allowed Orbit to categorise the exact area that supports nature's recovery. This can be represented for an individual location or totalled across a region or the entire group portfolio.

A project team was created consisting of members of sustainability, estates and property management. These colleagues were given a short half-day training session by a member of the Wildlife Trusts and then began a sample of surveys in the first years. This sample was carefully selected to represent the range of outdoor spaces across the portfolio.

The results of this sample were then extrapolated across the remaining portfolio producing an initial benchmark of 17% of Orbit's outdoor spaces being managed for nature's recovery. This was used to inform a wider business case that led to the adoption of the 30x30 commitment.

Moving forward, Orbit will continue to expand the number of outdoor spaces that are surveyed and to monitor the success of improved estates to monitor progress against the 30x30 target. This target is considered so robust that it has been incorporated into Orbit's sustainable finance framework, published in 2023.

3. Social benchmarking

Social benchmarking can take numerous forms and links with evaluation and resident engagement. Benchmarking the use of space and the benefits it brings allows us to establish a useful baseline for aspects that can typically be more difficult to quantify. We see two key areas for social benchmarking:

- Feedback to establish how the space is being used and the perceived value of it.
- A social value calculation providing a proxy financial measure.

Resident value benchmarking
Consider mechanisms which can be used to measure resident feedback on the project or programme. Are there any existing channels or surveys you're already using which can also be used to get feedback? For example, annual resident surveys or resident panels and community groups which are engaged with regularly. You could also consider surveying people while they are at a residents' meeting or local event and/or consider incentivising participation.

Consider the number of people using a green space. Not only physical access, but visual and audible as well. Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework proposes a target that everyone has access to a variety of good quality green and blue spaces within a 15-minute walk of their home.

Social value
This refers to the wider financial and non-financial value that is created in terms of wellbeing of individuals and communities, social capital created and the environment. There are a number of existing tools that can help you make a start on this, but it is an area that is being developed more comprehensively in the absence of a one-stop-shop.

HACT social value metric - your organisation may already be using the HACT social value metric for other activities. If this is the case, engage with the relevant teams to find out whether the metric can be expanded to capture the social value from the green space improvement as part of their existing measurements or calculations, this can then be included in your evaluations.

The Protecting & Improving Our Environment section of the National Themes, Outcomes and Measures framework (TOMs) for social value measurement can be used.

The ORVal tool is a helpful tool for understanding connectivity with surrounding green spaces and predicting public use.

The People and Nature Survey provides a huge amount of information on the public's use of green spaces and their perceived benefits in terms of health and wellbeing. This may be worth exploring to inform survey questions as part of your benchmarking and evaluation.

The health and wellbeing benefits of improved green spaces are clearly documented. The PHE report Public Health England, improving access to green space (2020) provides guidance on barriers to accessing green spaces and ways to ensure equitable access to green spaces for communities. Some of the aspects in the report could be formed into questions for your surveying to determine whether the green space improvement has been successful from a health and wellbeing perspective.

There may be the opportunity to connect with your local NHS provider to find out whether they are running any green social prescribing projects locally and how you can connect with their work.

Scotland's Place Standard Tool has a climate lens to be able to look at all elements of place and how it can impact health and wellbeing. Place Standard tool | Our Place.

4. Economic benchmarking

You need to be able to inform your business case by determining both the capital outlay required to develop improvements and the net change in maintenance and therefore service charge that could result. At this stage in the process it is likely to only be a provisional figure and more refinement will be necessary later as you work through the other sections in this guide.

It is recommended that practitioners plan for a net neutral impact on service charge by replacing high-maintenance grass with lower-maintenance and more biodiverse options.

Economic benchmarking should determine the relationship between the capital upfront cost and the assumed reduction in operating costs over time. There are numerous opportunities to reduce the cost to an organisation through grants, partner contributions and sustainable finance that should be explored and will in turn be supported by robust benchmarking.

Upfront costs and financial considerations	Net change in operational expenses
Materials and equipment (construction materials, lawn mowers, scarifiers, etc)	Training costs and associated time off day-to-day work for colleagues
Plants and associated protection	Design and communications
Personal protective equipment	Grounds maintenance
Engagement resources for colleagues and residents	Maintenance and repair of improved assets
Grants available	Resources will determine the ambition and scope of your benchmarking. Fewer resources may reduce the range of metrics captured or reduce sample sizes.
Social value contributions from supply chain	
Sustainable finance	

Tips to success

- Be clear on what you are setting out to do. Are you trying to improve a single green space or inform or deliver a wider organisational strategy?
- Identify a small number of key metrics that work for you.
- Aim for a mix of environmental, social and economic measures.
- Build a strong network of stakeholders to support you from a variety of teams.
- Benchmarking should be completed by personnel with necessary competency for the tool(s) you have selected to use.
- Develop a strong business case - consider financial and non-financial metrics.
- Habitats take time to develop - go back and monitor to demonstrate this.
- Data is crucial - it's a key enabler.



Hurdles	Solutions
Consolidated vision or strategy	Business wide strategy driven by wider targets eg sustainability strategy, net zero targets, biodiversity net gain, social value
Lack of baseline data	Identify technologies and stakeholders that can support building up a picture. Engage wider audience to demonstrate return on investment on technologies such as GIS mapping.
Categorisation of 'Green Assets'	Use tools and metrics that are fit for purpose for their application. During development stages more formal metrics such as the DEFRA metric will be used. When enhancing or maintaining green spaces then more simplistic tools can be used such as the Wildlife Trust Habitat Categorisation.
Uptake (internal)	Use auditing tools that enable use by existing resources and captures localised knowledge ie are not overly complicated and can be easily deployed across frontline staff or estates management teams and contractors.
Uptake (external)	Use apps or surveys that might help collect data from customer eg bird boxes, bat boxes, produce growing.
Integration across divisions	Engage different divisions early on and help them to understand where they and their data contribute to green spaces such as baseline data from development stages and estates mapping and ongoing auditing from estates inspections.
Using data to inform decisions	Ensure you obtain the right data to help shape 'Creating a Plan'. Ask yourself: "So what?". What does the data tell me and if the data points move in the future how will it tell me if the project has been a success?
Using data to demonstrate value	Use data to demonstrate where costs can be made or are being made. Ensure that you take into consideration whole like costs. Will there be longer term costs or savings? With will there be costs or savings outside of the project?
Resources and cost to undertake benchmarking	Select metrics that, where possible, allow you to scale assessment and monitoring within your existing organisation and resources. Training and support by technology may be required but this is most cost effective in the long run.

Milestone #3: Creating a plan

Create a clear plan with guiding principles that provide a framework to enhance green space and engage effectively with internal and external stakeholders.

Your green guide

Creating a clear plan with guiding principles will give you a framework to enhance your green spaces. Having a clear vision will help you to engage effectively with internal and external stakeholders all the way through the process. Including data on your existing and new open spaces will help you to be confident about the plans.

At this stage it is important to continue developing a culture of long-term stewardship. This will give you clearer sight on what works to deliver over the long term and which biodiversity gains are appropriate for the locality, the residents and your organisation. You will need to be thinking about a long-term approach to the management and use of the space upfront and engage with people as set out earlier.

We have already recommended that you look at green spaces through three lenses - improving its environmental value, the social benefits that green spaces bring and the economic considerations too. Improving biodiversity is a key focus, however, in developing the plan consider other benefits such as carbon sequestration and mitigation, climate resilience, wellbeing, resident satisfaction and cost control. We have done some thinking on these benefits in the box on this page.

Benefits

Social

- Recognising biophilic design benefits for health and wellbeing.
- Reducing anti-social behaviour.
- Community interaction and responsibility.
- Climate change resilience of assets .

Environmental

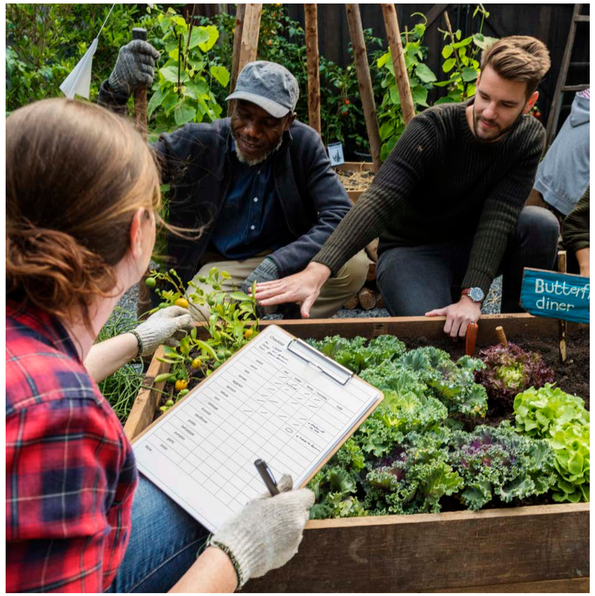
- Creating and enhancing habitats.
- Increasing pollinators.
- Reducing soil erosion and improve soil quality.
- Species adaptation to climate change.
- Connecting fragmentated areas.
- Flood protection.
- Cooling the urban heat island effect.
- Carbon storage.
- Reducing air pollution.

Economic

- Income generation opportunities such as habitat banking or food production.
- Elevating business reputation for safeguarding biodiversity.
- Supporting our sustainable strategy commitments.
- Increasing natural asset value.
- Creating employment from sustainable habitat management and maintenance.
- Creating more attractive areas for future occupiers.
- Less objections on nature conservation grounds.

Key points

- Create a clear vision for the space with guiding principles so you have detailed aims and objectives to work towards.
- Ensure your decision-making is data driven to maximise the effectiveness of resources to deliver biodiverse, compliant green spaces.
- Take a long-term approach, thinking about quality and how you can enhance and protect green spaces for the communities you work in.
- Co-create as much as you can with the people who will be using the green spaces to reflect local need and focus.
- Where possible align with existing strategies, priorities and governance frameworks such as ESHG reporting and customer satisfaction measurements for example.



Key steps

1. Creating a clear vision that people can get behind

Identify internal and external stakeholders and start engaging with them early in your thinking for their insights. This is likely to include:

- Customers
- External agencies such as the Woodland Trust, the Wildlife Trust and other charities
- Existing interested groups such as community groups, local horticulturalists and local nature groups
- The planning department
- Development, asset management, neighbourhood management and grounds maintenance colleagues; and contractors.

Workshops are often useful to help define the objectives and create buy-in to a plan. Plans that incorporate different elements will appeal to a broader number of people and so, where you can, reflect the different ‘layers’ of attraction for different residents and users. Develop and utilise local groups and partnerships such as local authorities and Natural England and use case studies to engage stakeholders and show what is possible. Our recommendations for engaging with communities will come into effect at this stage.

Using the information you have from your benchmarking and engagement activities carry out a simple strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the green spaces. This can be a helpful exercise to build your plan upon.

Once you have a good understanding of the local space, what is best for that environment, the community using the space and the economic factors, create a set of guiding principles and desired outcomes. You should identify how these align to your organisation's core vison and strategies. Then start to define the environmental, social and economic outcomes that you want. You will need to consider how you are going to measure these and how they can apply to get the right solution for the design for each space in its local context. A standard template approach may not work for existing spaces and new developments in the same way so beware of this. We explore measurements further in milestone #6.

It will be helpful to use your business plan, benchmarking information and the SWOT analysis alongside your plan to communicate to stakeholders the effects and benefits of changes. Busting the myths around capacity, costs and resources (which we set out in the business plan section of this model) will be important, particularly the principle of net zero impact on service charge.

Lastly, don't forget to test your thinking out with others – particularly those who will use the space.

Green Space Vision: Provide safe, biodiverse and sustainable spaces

Priorities	**Data driven Decision making**	**Quality Open spaces**	**Resident- centred approach**
Strategic vision	Maximise effectiveness of resources to deliver compliant & biodiverse open spaces	Protect, enhance & maintain open spaces for the long-term	Co-create thriving communities through local focus & need
Objectives	• Record & assess spaces • Compliance with legislation • Improve safety & security • Prioritisation matrix for investment • Review & measure return on investment	• Improve sustainability • Establish clear standards • Targeted investment plan • Develop training & skills • Maintain high standards	• Customer involvement & influence • Social value • Affordable spaces • Improved health & wellbeing • Resilient communities
Outcomes	• Holistic view of open space (including local) provision, distribution, quality, value • Highlighting where issues of deficiency, liability, poor quality and access exist & need addressing • Compliance reporting • Support asset appraisal modelling • Long term investment plan • More effective procurement and streamlined processes • Support funding applications • Support ESG reporting • Continuous improvement	• Providing a clear process to guide design, delivery & maintenance • Protecting & enhancing biodiversity & ecological habitats & routes between places for wildlife • Providing nature-based solutions to improve water quality & flood control • Contributing to raising air quality and moderating extremes of temperature • Improve carbon capture and reporting on carbon sequestration • Motivating staff & customers through training opportunities	• Promoting partnership working, community involvement and greater use of open spaces by all • Improve physical & social inclusion, providing places for recreation, walking, cycling and safe routes to school • Provide for children & young people's play targeting areas most in need • Tackling problems of deprivation, access & health inequalities
Foundations	**Information Management / systems and processes**		

2. Key components to your plan

- Ask yourself throughout the process whether there are opportunities for quick wins to help engagement and to test new approaches.
- Think carefully about the investment of time and timing your activities. You need to work seasonally, plan resources and engage the community effectively.
- Create a risk map and make this practical so it can be a live document that helps people to work through problems and risks.
- Identify any training or education needs for colleagues, residents and external stakeholders that will support success of the plan.
- Ensure there are systems and procedures in place to help delivery and record changes to design, stakeholder engagement and maintenance.
- Define your procurement requirements from grounds maintenance contractors, consultants and specialists. This should include creating a plan for upskilling colleagues and customers to develop the spaces and maintain them for the long term.
- Regularly review the aims, compliance requirements and outcomes with your stakeholders - this is an iterative process.
- Ensure you build in points to celebrate success, monitor and report on benefits.



3. Consider governance

Governance is key to any successful project or programme. Below are some key considerations when thinking about this area, particularly in relation to approvals and evaluation:

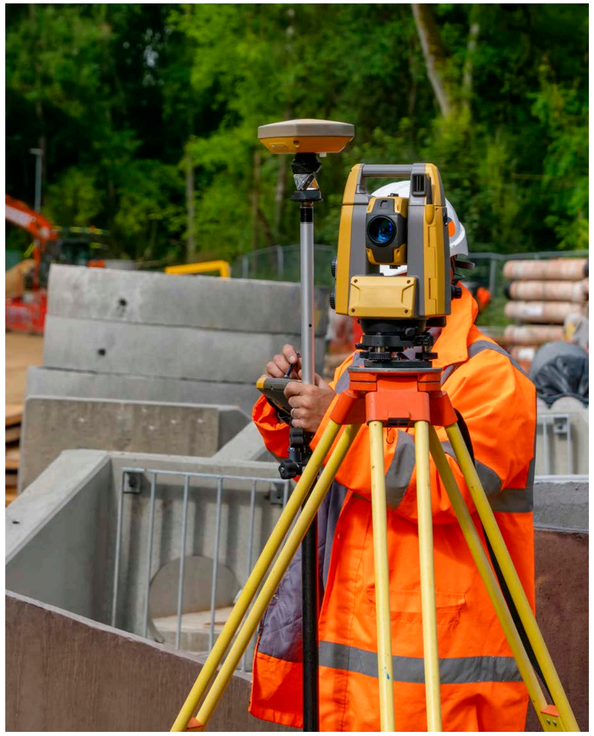
- Define a clear reporting structure, what is the approval process and who are the key internal decision makers and stakeholders that need to be involved? If you are looking at developing a biodiversity strategy and programme you may wish to consider setting up an internal working group to aid delivery.
- Who are you reporting to, what information do they need to see and how often are you reporting to them? Ensure that you do not make this too onerous from a data collection perspective, but it is valuable and will be used for various means.
- Ensure you have people involved in the governance structure that are experts, can ask the right questions, identify risk and help you to unblock hurdles.

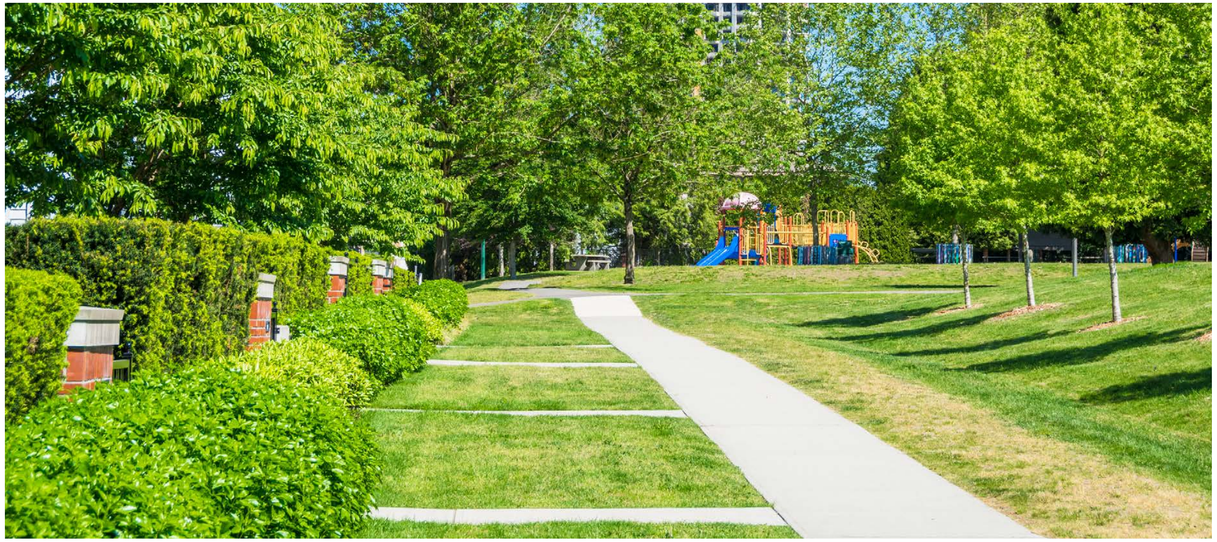
4. Procurement

The value that can be gained from working with your supply chain is significant. When entering into procurement therefore it is worth thinking carefully about what value contractors can bring and how you measure it, how their values align with your organisation's and the consequences of what you are asking for on overall cost and quality.

Existing contractors may rally against changes as they could potentially lose money if contracts change. You also need to manage contractor expectations before, during and after. No-one makes money in low 'business' input areas. Contractors need to make a profit, so it is important to consider this when designing the terms of the contract to get the best performance. Also think carefully where differing incentives may rise such as contractors recommending planting that requires ongoing maintenance and therefore costs.

Regular reviews of contracts based on climate changes, not just every five years or so, is also something to factor into consideration.





Tips to success

Hurdles	Solutions
Cost	Good design with customer engagement will provide long term benefits, reduction in maintenance and repair as customers will adopt the green spaces and reduce anti-social behaviour. Changes should be at worst net zero cost for service charge.
Lack of engagement	Early engagement will enable stakeholders to be brought on the journey and help influence the vision and the plan. Getting internal stakeholder buy-in is crucial.
Skills gap	Working with internal teams and delivery and maintenance partners to improve skills, moving away from schedules of works (eg 20 grass cuts a year) to working with the space to encourage biodiversity. Establish or join working groups with other housing providers, contractors and green spaces or nature charities to continually share and review best practices.
Culture change	Creating an understanding of what you are trying to achieve will create the space for ideas, innovation and culture making the change needed to improve green spaces easier. Bring the maintenance teams with you on the journey. They will need to maintain for the longer term and may need to change their practices.
Review	Adopt a lessons learned approach and review what has worked and what hasn't openly to help improve future delivery.

See more

See the **tools, sources and case studies** that we recommend you look at relating to engaging with your communities.



Milestone #4: Partnering & funding

Discover the woodland grants and incentives available.

Your green guide

Introduction

Partnering with others is a great way to be able to achieve more through combining resources, skills and knowledge. Partnerships can help us to overcome challenges, create new ideas and drive momentum. They can also help to identify and unlock different sources of funding. Working together also increases awareness, brings more people onboard and ensures greater aftercare and maintenance of green spaces. Partnering supports habitat connectivity, green corridors and greater access to green spaces.

We set out the importance of involving the users of green spaces in other milestones. Partnering with local community groups helps to understand their aspirations and fosters a sense of ownership and pride in local environments. It also helps us to better understand the local area and how it responds to flooding, for example. Collaborating with experts in local ecology is key for delivering the intended benefits for nature.

We recommend considering wider agendas such as health, sport and community to integrate funding sources from outside the social housing sector. Experts can help housing associations identify, justify and evaluate costs for designing and managing green spaces. It's important to dedicate funding to getting projects off the ground and green spaces maintained, so the community and environmental benefits can be sustained.

Key points

- Involving experts and communities.
- The role of others in partnerships.
- Overcoming the skills gap.
- Accessing funding.
- Learning from others.

Key steps

1. Involving the experts

Developing a breadth of relationships is important. To unlock the potential of our green spaces, landlords need to work with:

- The community – it is essential to establish the role of the community in any green space project. Engaging customers, community groups and volunteers will be key as they will be the ones using green spaces. Consider local schools, sports clubs and volunteers.
- Internal teams – housing and neighbourhood officers, asset management and repairs colleagues are a great starting point for identifying local connections. Volunteering staff groups can also help.
- Local experts – have extensive knowledge of local habitats, species, and communities. They will understand local challenges, aspirations, initiatives already underway. They are more likely to be able to identify solutions that will work for the place.



- Local businesses – identify local businesses that have similar objectives and partner with them to achieve outcomes.
- Local authorities – they hold the key to land, labour and funding. Local authority community development officers and community volunteering schemes will be aware of local groups. They are also required to develop Local Nature Recovery Strategies by 2025.
- Environmental groups (national or local) – provide knowledge and guidance for local species and habitats. They may also support community engagement. Groups could include Bumblebee Trusts, Wetland Trust, Friend of groups, In Bloom groups and the National Federation of Parks.
- Local Nature Partnerships – these include a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who aim to bring improvements in their local natural environment. There are 47 Local Nature Partnerships registered with DEFRA.
- Estate management teams and contractors – provisions must be made for long term management post-design. This will ensure green space functions and benefits are sustained over time.

2. The role of others in partnerships

Seek out the expertise of national and local agencies and ecologists. They can provide knowledge and support on local wildlife, habitat connectivity and community engagement. Consider local species protection groups as well as national conservation organisations.

Partner with local authorities, other housing associations, planning authorities, local maintenance contractors, funders, community groups, volunteers and PR teams to increase awareness, support collaboration and ensure the long-term use and care of green spaces.

Work with consultancies and green space organisations to promote the business case for nature and demonstrate natural capital. Promote the benefits from social value to carbon sequestration and use this to help secure future funding and partnerships (see the final milestone on evaluation for ideas).

Consider working with organisations like Building with Nature or the Green Flag Award to benchmark and certify green space quality.

Identify what other landowners and community groups in the local area are looking to deliver and find ways to work together to maximise outcomes – desk-based research easily leads to identifying local partners.

- Think beyond one-off payments and donations.
- Beware of partners being very scientific and technical with less practical application and challenges in translating advice into practice.

At Ground Control's Wildfell Centre for Environmental Recovery, a 296-acre nature laboratory in North Essex, ecologists test landscape design and management practices and identify innovations to help social housing clients use green spaces well.

This includes how to best adapt landscapes to mitigate against extremes of climate change including localised flood risk and heat island temperatures, nature friendly planting schemes, and nature-positive grounds maintenance regimes.



3. Overcoming the skills gap

Partnering with the right people can help to overcome skills gaps and provide knowledge that is not held in-house. We suggest that when you start 'creating a plan', identify where you expect a skills gap to form and carry out desk-based research to identify local partners to help. Look to build longer-term sustainable relationships for continuity of management and advice relating to the site.

We believe in sharing skills and knowledge for us all to benefit from better designed and managed green spaces. So why not consider a consortium approach to training and skills? Get together with others in your area and see what you can achieve. Seek out external knowledge and expertise to identify suitable green space designs and share it.

We also believe that supply chain partnerships play a key role in a better approach to green spaces. Explore with supply chain partners where you can find expert advice and engagement as well as funding for green space and placemaking projects. Embed biodiversity gains and green skills as part of procurement contracts. Through your supply chain partners you could secure green space management training for staff and customers to enable green space users to become green space managers.

Tip:
It is worth remembering that people tend to revert to existing behaviours and ways of doing things very easily and so part of the skills and training gap will be the energy needed to keep the new 'shape and structure' in play until it becomes the normal approach and method.

4. Accessing funding

Try to think about funding of green spaces in a broad way – link it with other budgets and areas of business such as regeneration, retrofit, green skills or anti-social behaviour. There are often cycles of national or regional funding that can be used to help enhance green spaces. Such funding may be linked to broader remits such as levelling up, sustainability or urban regeneration. Consider other areas such as homeless reduction, health and sport to access indirect funding and drive wider benefits. Work collaboratively to find the right solution for the particular area.

New developments, large green space projects and large organisations may have greater access to funding so it's important to collaborate with partners that can help access funding. In addition, sometimes we have to collaborate with colleagues and partners to find solutions to problems and create value from non-green focused funding.

It can often help to secure funding through identifying the value of green spaces and natural capital has beyond the annual budgets – for example around social value, health and wellbeing benefits and net-zero targets. We cover a lot of this in our final milestone – evaluation. There may also be the potential for biodiversity and carbon credits to support funding changes.

As with our advice on skills, try to build funding opportunities at a procurement level with suppliers and contractors. Be sure to use funds and communicate how money from suppliers and contractors is used each year and the outcomes it delivers. It is also worth working with environmental agencies to identify funding opportunities and join green space or planting campaigns that may include funding. Be careful however that this doesn't involve considerable resource for a single element of green space improvement.

Lastly, think about longevity – develop funding and partnerships for the design, implementation and long-term management of green spaces if this is relevant.

Tips to success

Hurdles	Solutions
A lack of understanding of funding available to social landlords.	Access support from the supply chain and identify local partners who can help with this. Have an established action plan for any projects before applying for external funding. There is often a short timescale and only one shot at getting the bid right.
Partnerships costs money, need sustaining and can take time to develop.	Think about existing partnerships already in place. You should also look to identify partners who are bought into common objectives so you can share resources.
Beware of increasing service charges as a result of excitement people have about certain initiatives such as tree planting.	By having and vision, strategy and a plan you will have a clear picture of what you are trying to achieve. This helps guard against isolated initiatives that may detract resources and instead will keep a focus on the long-term gains you are looking to make.
Many green space partners are charities. Some partners may be very scientific with little experience working with housing associations.	Think about much time and effort you can devote to partners and how closely aligned they are to your objectives. A consortium may be more effective in some situations that individual partnerships.
Creating long-term sustainable partnerships is challenging due to staff turnover and changing views.	By having a clear strategy and plan for the place you are more likely to be able to stay on course to achieve your objectives despite the hurdles that present themselves along the way. Having said that, it is important however to be flexible and to consider where improvements can be made. We expect technology and knowledge of environmental sustainability to significantly improve over time. Partnerships will therefore need to evolve.

Case study - Living in the Landscape

Peabody is leading a major regeneration and placemaking programme across Thamesmead, with a mission to grow, improve and look after the town for the long term. The organisation owns two-thirds of the land across this South-East London town, which straddles the boroughs of Bexley and Greenwich and is roughly the same size as central London. As well as looking after more than 5,000 homes across in Thamesmead, Peabody are also custodians of more than 240 hectares of parks and green space, five lakes, seven kilometres of canals and 54,000 trees.

Peabody's Living in the Landscape green infrastructure framework outlines its inclusive approach to improving and maintaining Thamesmead's extraordinary natural assets for everyone's benefit. The framework is supported by a comprehensive Biodiversity Action Plan, providing guidance on how local people can help protect and enhance Thamesmead's priority habitats and species.

Getting the community involved in projects and programmes across Thamesmead is central to successful long-term stewardship of the town. Peabody's Making Space for Nature (MSFN) programme is all about engaging people so they can make the most of the outdoor spaces on their doorstep. It includes one off and regular activities, events and communications that connect people in Thamesmead with nature, wildlife and the landscape. and the Mayor of London - It includes one-off and regular activities, events and communications that connect people in Thamesmead with nature, wildlife and the landscape. The programme was set up in 2019 with CLEVER CITIES (a European Horizon 2020 funded research project) and their partners Groundwork London.

The five main strands of the programme are:

1. **A monthly nature forum that meets to discuss local projects, share information and visit interesting events or sites of interest.**

2. **A regular volunteering group that meets in parks and nature reserves across Thamesmead, giving them the opportunity to learn new skills, meet new people and spend time outdoors. The group complete conservation activity, habitat creation and planting.**

3. **Six community gardens that provide space for both communal and individual growing of fruits, vegetables and herbs. Gardeners benefit from the social interaction, time spent outdoors and the produce from the gardens.**

4. **An educational programme which is delivered at Tump 53 Nature Reserve, a highly valued woodland, meadow and lake in the Moorings. There are more than 2,000 visits made by local young people each year, during which they can learn about Thamesmead habitats and wildlife.**

5. **A community fund that supports new ideas in Thamesmead to be delivered by individuals or organisations. The fund is directed towards projects that encourage the use of green and blue space in Thamesmead or that help to improve or increase growing and gardening in the area.**



Making Space for Nature has played a key role in how we've communicated and involved people in the the £3.9 million South Thamesmead Garden Estate programme, also set up with CLEVER Cities, Groundwork London and the Mayor of London. Having started in 2018, this five-year initiative is transforming more than three hectares of under-used green spaces in this southeast London neighbourhood. It aims to explore how nature-based solutions can help address the effects of the climate crisis, increase biodiversity, and help tackle social and economic inequalities.

The programme has been designed by muf architecture/ art, in association with the self-titled Community Design Collective (CDC) - a group of local residents who were recruited and trained to work on the programme part-time on the London Living Wage. The CDC has been involved in all aspects of the design process: investing more than 1,500 hours in design conversations, site visits and client meetings between 2018 and 2023.

The South Thamesmead Garden Estate is being delivered in two phases and will deliver a raft of improvements, shaped by local people's lived experiences. The first phase, which completed in 2021, has seen the creation of an edible garden for local people; planting of wildflower meadows; and high-quality planting, lighting and play equipment and seating across two large housing estates. The second phase, which began in 2023 and will complete in 2024, will see the transformation of more than three hectares of land into a reinvigorated and better connected landscape. This will include refurbished pathways and new seating to improve accessibility; picturesque and habitat friendly planting and new trees (including fruit trees); social and cooking areas; an outdoor classroom; rain gardens; new and upgraded play areas; and new lighting. As the second phase is delivered, the CDC will continue to meet and monitor the progress.

The South Thamesmead Garden Estate programme is already showing that local people are agents of change. The Young Foundation, a partner of CLEVER Cities, is looking at how best to measure the social impact of the work in Thamesmead. This includes developing a monitoring and evaluation plan based on a theory of change outcome-based framework, and working with community members to help define the success criteria. This evaluation work will continue after the project's end and Peabody has committed to post-occupancy monitoring for up to five years.

"The South Thamesmead Garden Estate aims to welcome everyone from the community. By bringing local people into decision-making and discussion, and by listening and learning, we are creating a revitalised landscape for people right on their doorstep. We've learned so much through this programme which we'll now be applying to other projects throughout the town." Phil Askew Director of Landscaping and Placemaking.

The programme is one of many landscaping and placemaking initiatives where Thamesmead residents take a leading role in transforming their neighbourhood. Other examples include the revitalisation of green space in Claridge Way (commended in the RIBAJ), planting trees in South London's first ever Tiny Forest, and designing a welcoming, accessible and greener route connecting Southmere Lake to the River Thames.



Milestone #5: Implementation

Access the help you need to implement your green space plan. From application and biodiversity action plans, to landscape design, habitat construction, arboricultural supervision and ongoing management.

Your green guide

Introduction

Project implementation is the vital phase where the planned activities of a project are put into action to achieve desired outcomes. For improved green spaces, this includes crucial results such as increased biodiversity, better health outcomes and enhanced community cohesion with a commitment to protect their green spaces. After completing the prior necessary steps (you will have already engaged your community, benchmarked your existing space, created your plan and sought sufficient funding and partners), it is time to put your plan into action.

Effective project implementation around green spaces ensures successful outcomes, improves stakeholder relationships, and contributes to protecting the planet, while also having innumerable benefits for people and our economy.

Who leads the implementation phase?

During the implementation phase, project managers play a key role in overseeing the execution of the project. It is important to establish clear roles and responsibilities for the team members during the planning phase, even if you don't have a dedicated project manager. What's more, engagement with maintenance teams and providers is especially important; they need to be brought on the journey so that they can effectively continue to deliver the open space after the installation.

Empowering champions throughout the project lifecycle can be key to success. Localised ownership and stewardship can help scale with success, especially if the project management is through a central small resource.

Why is effective project implementation important?

Effective project implementation is essential as it serves as the bridge between the project plan and the actual improvements in green spaces. Without decisive action and implementation of green spaces and biodiversity projects, the continued loss of green, open and wild spaces will have massive economic, social and environmental repercussions. To ensure successful implementation, consistent communication, flexibility, and transparency are vital.

Key points

1. **Reassess the plan.**
2. **Execute the plan.**
3. **Make adjustments.**
4. **Analysis and feedback.**

Key steps

1. Reassess the plan:

While you have already been through the 'Creating a plan' phase (milestone #3), it is a good idea to reassess your plan before jumping into implementation.

You should:

- Clarify project objectives, roles, and responsibilities within the team eg defining who in the team has adequate expertise around ecology, community engagement, organisational operations, etc. and ensuring that all players are aware of the project and any work they need to contribute.
- Ensure shared understanding of timelines, milestones, and deliverables.
- Use this opportunity to reinforce teamwork and cooperation.

2. Execute the plan:

Now that you have reassessed the plan and set expectations within the team, it's time to implement your project. If you have created a strong, thorough, supported and adaptable plan, this step, in theory, should be relatively straightforward. You should:

- Implement the project according to the established plan.
- Have mechanisms in place to capture all relevant data to measure the success of the project.
- Maintain regular communication with the team to ensure that everyone is on the same page and address any questions or concerns.
- Monitor resources and progress to keep the project on schedule and within budget.
- Provide frequent updates to key stakeholders to maintain transparency and relevance.
- Provide case studies and evidence here to keep stakeholders on-side. For example, a local resident might compliment the scheme eg "This is the first time I have heard a Nightingale sing near my home". Share feedback like this with stakeholders to maintain momentum and celebrate successes.





3. Adjustments:

During most projects, you can expect changes in implementation that deviate from the original plan. For example, additional requests from key stakeholders could materialise, or you might have to make unexpected changes to keep the project within its proposed timescale or budget. These adjustments shouldn't be feared and should be made as necessary, relying on the project plan and the knowledge from the team and relevant stakeholders to identify workable solutions. When considering any changes you will need to ensure the project stays true to what it is trying to achieve.

For example, during implementation you realise you might benefit from more stakeholder engagement, increased training of maintenance teams or altered landscaping for improved biodiversity or resident satisfaction. All of these might force you to alter your timescales or budget or rethink plans. To ensure adjustments are made effectively and do not derail the project, you should:

- Anticipate changes where possible during the implementation phase.
- Be flexible and responsive to unforeseen circumstances or stakeholder requests, whilst at the same time ensuring that these do not derail the plan.
- Be prepared to allocate additional resources, if needed, to keep the project on track.
- Embrace changes as opportunities for improvement.
- Communicate adjustments to the project openly to stakeholders and allow for further consultation if needed.

Change is the reality for lots of green space projects and these should be faced head on. How you are able to handle and adjust in response will affect the success rate of your green space projects.

4. Analysis, evaluation and feedback:

Once the team has produced the project's deliverables it is time to gather feedback. Talk to stakeholders and assess what went well and what didn't. This is essential to plan for future projects and to effectively maintain this project. The next section will explore this in detail.

By following these key points, themes and steps, social housing providers can ensure effective project implementation, leading to successful green space projects and positive outcomes for residents and environment.

What to do when things go wrong

Things go wrong in projects all the time. This isn't something that you should be afraid of. Here are some actions you can take when things go wrong in practice:



1. Identify the problem early: identify the issues causing the project to go off track and conduct a thorough analysis to understand root causes.
2. Communicate: inform all stakeholders about the situation, as well as the steps being taken to address issues - transparent communication is crucial during challenging times.
3. Assess the impact: on the project's timeline, budget and overall objectives, which will help to determine urgency and priorities.
4. Create a contingency plan: to mitigate the impact, outlining alternative strategies and actions to get the project back on track. Be prepared to adjust deadlines, resources, or the project scope. If your project is high risk, it might be worth creating a contingency plan in the planning phase.
5. Engage the project team in problem-solving: brainstorm solutions and ideas together to overcome challenges.
6. Seek expert advice: if issues are complex or beyond the team's expertise, consider seeking advice from consultants or experts, who could offer new perspectives.
7. Take responsibility: Avoid blaming individuals, take responsibility as a leader and focus on working closely with the team to find solutions.
8. Implement actions: implement corrective actions promptly. Monitor the progress and adjust the approach if needed.
9. Review and learn: after the project is back on track, conduct a lessons learned analysis to review the project's challenges and how they were addressed. Use this opportunity to identify improvements for future projects.
10. Lastly, stay positive and flexible throughout! Remember, encountering problems during a project is not unusual. It's how you handle them that can make a significant difference in the project's ultimate success.

Tips to success

Hurdles	Solutions
Remaining within budget scope and project timeline.	■ Use an actions tracker and targets dashboard. ■ Regularly measure project performance. ■ Ensure comprehensive budget planning. Think about any variables or unexpected costs that might occur.

Not involving all stakeholders at the start.	■ Engage all necessary stakeholders through consultation, co-design, and strategy development.
	■ Engagement with maintenance teams and providers is especially important. Things will go wrong if they are not involved at the start and the successful maintenance of projects will be unlikely.
	  ■ **Invite to discussions at the beginning.**
	  ■ **Listen and integrate their opinions.**
	  ■ **Provide training and education where needed.**
	  ■ **Show how new changes link to your organisation's values and aims.**
	  ■ **Give grounds maintenance teams a sense of ownership around the land that they manage eg can you provide them with a small patch and 'plant growing kit', so that they can see the results themselves and want to replicate this?**

Lack of clarity.	■ Make sure that team members and stakeholders are aware of project goals that involve them, and how their goals relate to those of other team members. ■ To make cooperation easier, make sure that stakeholders understand what they can gain from a project. ■ Conduct thorough research and define requirements. ■ Maintain transparent and consistent communication.
Lack of ongoing customer support.	■ Develop strategies for continuous resident engagement for the project. ■ Consider activities such as signage updates, events, information dissemination, and citizen science participation. ■ Demonstrate on-site presence and communicate both the project successes, and more importantly, failures effectively. ■ Focus on customer engagement for loyalty and positive reputation. ■ Document and celebrate achievements. Document the project's milestones, successes, and lessons learned. Share the outcomes and impacts with customers, showcasing the positive changes achieved through the green space improvement project. Celebrate achievements to inspire further environmental initiatives and promote sustainable communities.

Hurdles	Solutions
Overpromised and underdelivered.	Realistically assess available time, budget, and resources during the planning phase. Set clear expectations through internal and external communication.
Knowledge, skills and technology gaps.	■ Identify and address relevant gaps for successful implementation. ■ Use existing knowledge from local teams and customers. ■ Consider training and buy-in from grounds maintenance teams, new technology and equipment, and expert assistance. ■ Address resistance to change by prioritising engagement, upskilling the workforce, and connecting project goals to organisational values. ■ Involve local teams and leverage their knowledge.
Political barriers.	Develop a business case and ensure clear understanding of the project's purpose, benefits, and alignment with organisational values across all levels of stakeholders.



Case study: Thamesmead – from grey to green

Background

In 2017 Peabody commissioned designers, Land Use Consultants (LUC) and Levitt Bernstein Associates (LBA), to improve around two hectares of public realm of the Parkview and Southmere estates in South Thamesmead. The brief was to create a more pleasant and inviting environment for residents. While the open spaces outside people's 1960s homes had been maintained over the decades, they not been improved since they were created.

The £4.3m project was the first of a two phase £10m investment programme in the South Thamesmead, borne out of a public realm strategy created for Peabody by Levitt Bernstein in 2016. Enhancing and maintaining natural assets across the town is a key part of Peabody's plan to improve, grow and look after Thamesmead for the long term.

Improvements across the Parkview and Southmere estates involved 'greening' the grey walkways and enhancing open spaces right outside people's front doors. Changes included replacing trees that were too big for green courtyards with better-sized, diverse mature trees; installing above-ground planters; planting creepers along parts of the walkways; and introducing beds in the hard and soft landscape. The beds were planted with colourful, textural and biodiverse perennials, including bulbs and herbaceous plants. Some were designed as attractive raingardens, acting as sustainable urban drainage systems. Other improvements to the estate included new lighting, play and seating areas.

idverde landscape contractors carried out the works during 2019/20 and went on to win a BALI National Landscape award for their involvement. In 2021 the Southmere estate was commended as a runner up in the Landscape Institute's award for horticulture and planting design.



Implementation

The success of this greening project, delivered during the wettest winter on record and through the covid pandemic, was largely down to collaborative working, effective communication and carefully programme management between Peabody, idverde, LUC and Levitt Bernstein.

From the outset, teams agreed ways of working to ensure issues could be dealt with swiftly and with minimal disruption to the hundreds of residents affected by it. Peabody requested a resident liaison officer as part of their original tender, with the aim of providing clear and consistent communication between residents, Peabody and contractors working on the project.

Reassessing the plan

Following the tender process, Peabody and idverde held a series of meetings to review their tender submission in detail. Together they agreed expected design outcomes, set the programme and agreed their approach to working so closely to people's homes.

As the landscaping work would be taking place on many people's doorsteps, there was a clear need for idverde to work safely, efficiently and with minimal disruption. The programme of works was therefore split into 16 phases, with a requirement for work to complete on one phase before the next one started.


Before


After



Executing the plan

idverde set up local site offices on the Southmere and the Parkview estates while the landscaping work took place. This was an ideal base both for their construction team and Peabody's resident liaison officer.

Both the Parkview and Southmere sites included green courtyards with limited storage space and walkways which sometimes had first floors of buildings ahead, meaning access and storage was challenging. idverde therefore set up several small compounds to store materials as close to the sites as possible and identified other nearby places to provide secure storage for tools and equipment.

To ensure all teams understood and agreed the quality and standards for the scheme, Peabody asked idverde to produce a range specific Inspection and Test Plans (ITPs) for key stages of the construction process. Each ITP ensured that the work fully complied with the original specification and design, and that any amendments had been agreed between all teams. Peabody appointed a clerk of works to oversee delivery of work and quickly handle any issues raised. Having someone on hand to do this helped to forge a strong working relationships between Peabody and idverde.

Making adjustments

As with any project of this size and scale, there were questions, changes and challenges along the way. Difficult ground conditions which were not apparent in initial surveys included a clay seam, asbestos in soils, high water table, unmapped and low lying utilities and reinforced concrete slabs across different parts of the construction site. This meant that certain plans needed to be redesigned as the works were being delivered.

These and other changes to the brief, along with questions and queries, were documented in a communications log, set up by Peabody's project manager, and shared with contactors and the design team. The document ensured teams had a clear and mutual understanding of any amendments and helped the programme progress without unnecessary delay. The log was incorporated into idverde's project handover document for Peabody as a permanent record of what was agreed.

Regular scheduled meetings took place throughout the course of the project to ensure work was progressing as expected, and the programme completed after 49 weeks. Members of Peabody's environmental services team then went on to shadow idverde's maintenance team for a further two years to learn about the aftercare of these newly created spaces. They also undertook additional training. In addition, Peabody recruited new team members to look after the enhanced spaces. This was all completed in time for the contract ending with idverde and the maintenance being handed back fully to the Peabody team.

Feedback and analysis

As this was the first project of its kind in Thamesmead, a number of lessons were learned including:

1 Bringing residents into decision making and engaging them in a creative way

Engaging residents in a landscaping programme alongside a regeneration programme was at time challenging, with many people feeling 'consultation fatigue' as a result of other regeneration work. To help drive interest from residents, Peabody trialled pilot 'show and tell' projects on site. These included installing small oak planters providing opportunities for residents to plant them, setting up a model raingarden to show how it would look and work, and creating murals to find if residents liked particular colours and designs. Although these mini projects generally provided a very clear idea of what people did or did not like, the 'show and tell' process with many residents was sometimes time consuming and costly.

As a result, Peabody went on to deepen resident engagement in the second phase of investment while also ensuring it was cost-effective. They set up a co-design process, where a group of 10 residents were recruited, trained and paid to make decisions on all kinds of issues, from including ongoing care and repair of equipment (rather than complete renewal), to selection of new play equipment and materials, to choosing plants. In this stage, pilot 'show and tell' projects were replaced with simple sessions with the CDC to test new (but not yet agreed) ideas using low-cost 'props'. These included the use of a plastic sheeting and water to test the idea of a new slide, temporary use of people's barbecues to try out a new outdoor cooking area, and a chance to operate a remote control lawnmower to design new green pathways.

2 Changing a process when needed

Surveys in the first phase of investment in South Thamesmead did not reveal the extent of the challenging ground conditions. This meant that the design team needed to spend more time on site to find design solutions. Having learned how challenging the ground conditions were in this large-scale project, the design team was clearer on how to avoid the pitfalls for future work. For the second phase of investment, only once the designs were agreed did Peabody commission detailed surveys. The findings of the surveys were then used to make any tweaks to the final design.

3 Bringing in the right people for the job

Clear ways of working between Peabody, the design team and idverde agreed to ensure minimal disruption to residents and that the works adhered to the programme. Peabody's appointment of both a resident liaison officer helped to ensure the residents were informed of what has happening and a clerk of works kept the project running smoothly. The training of our environmental services team and recruitment of others has ensured that the green spaces continue to flourish.





Before



After

Peabody used the learnings and knowledge from this first phase to shape the brief for the South Thamesmead Garden Estate programme, the second and final phase of the £10million investment programme.

Milestone #6: Evaluation

Learn how to effectively monitor and evaluate sites which have received improvements. Assess whether the proposed outcomes were achieved and generate learnings.

Your green guide

Introduction

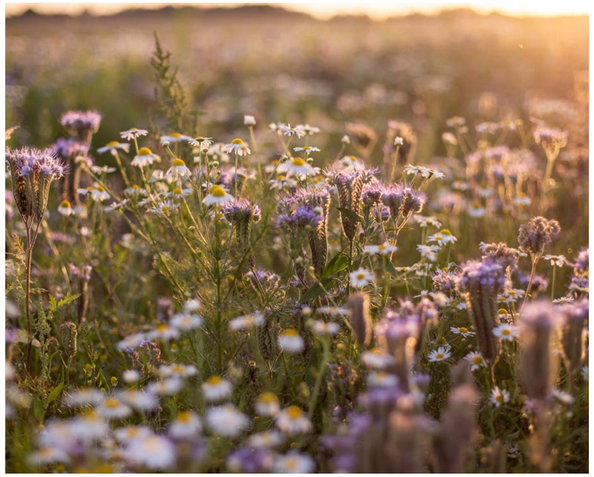
Evaluating all aspects of a project is important. It will be necessary to periodically monitor and evaluate sites which have received improvements. This will allow an organisation to assess whether the proposed outcomes were achieved and to generate learnings. By committing to perform this evaluation, and following through, you will build trust with senior leaders making the long-term success of your project more likely. We are all constantly learning more about environmental sustainability and therefore as we learn together it is natural that we will want to continue to improve our approaches.

The metrics used for evaluation will likely be very similar to benchmarking. Those criteria that attracted the most attention and were pivotal during a business case should absolutely be monitored to assess their delivery.

It is recommended that you should monitor your green space regularly (at least annually) for the first two years after an outdoor space is improved. Ideally this would be more frequent to make sure that any issues with maintenance or resident feedback can be identified and responded to promptly. Over time, the frequency can be reduced to once every few years or following reports of a change by stakeholders. Remember to continually evaluate the other gains targeted as well because these are likely to change positively or negatively over time, for example carbon, social value, impacts on health and wellbeing.

It must be remembered that it can take time for habitat improvements to mature and that there can be bumps along the way. A wildflower meadow for example, can take two to three years to achieve its full potential. Whips (small bare-root trees) cannot be counted as higher condition hedgerow or woodland for many years. The frequency will need to be adapted to evaluate the development of different types of habitat.

It is also recommended to develop a plan for what to do where evaluation reveals that not everything has been a success. Will you replace plants that have succumbed to drought? Will you amend grounds maintenance regimes where a wildflower meadow did not take? Answers to these questions should be readily available as there will be setbacks along the way, especially in larger geographical programmes.



What is evaluation?

Evaluation is a key part of testing whether your action to improve green spaces has been successful. If carried out meaningfully, it can produce outputs which can be used to further engage stakeholders and prove the case to enable additional funding or resources to roll out the approach.

If you are piloting a particular approach to improving green spaces, evaluation can enable you to draw conclusions about whether the approach was successful and, if not provide guidance on how to adjust for future projects.

Why is evaluation important?

Evaluation is important because it provides data to drive improvements and delivers an iterative project. Evaluation also helps identify challenges and solutions, enabling changes to be made at different points throughout your project and demonstrates the value of green space improvements to key stakeholders showing how the improvements have been made but also why and how.



Key points

1. **Identify stakeholders.**
2. **Define when you will evaluate.**
3. **Set your evaluation criteria:**
   - environmental evaluation
   - social evaluation
   - resident value
   - social value
   - economic evaluation.
4. **Verification and certification.**

Key steps

1. Identify stakeholders

This is a key part of the process of evaluation -, mapping and defining those stakeholders which you will need to involve in your objective to make better use of green spaces.

Identifying the correct stakeholders can:

- help with gaining traction internally
- unlock further funding
- demonstrate the additional benefits of green spaces projects which may not otherwise have been considered ie social value benefits or improved health and wellbeing of residents.

Think about who you need to engage with internally to move the project forwards. Appoint a senior sponsor who will hold overall responsibility. Think broadly about the people who will be involved in the green space, users of it, maintainers and other interested parties. Set up a way to involve them in the evaluation on an ongoing basis.

2. Defining when you will evaluate

The next step is to think about when you will evaluate your project. As a guide, it is recommended that you use evaluation at three key stages, ideally:

- **Early in the project to pitch it to stakeholders and gain traction and buy in.**
- **Mid-way through to ensure that you're on track and enable the space to adjust anything as necessary.**
- **Once you have implemented plans to determine successes and challenges and communicate to stakeholders, noting that the responsible stewardship of green spaces is ongoing.**

Remember that some target outcomes may take many years to establish. Equally you may want to consider evaluation that is stipulated by law, for example monitoring on biodiversity net gain, or mandated by relevant governance frameworks.

3. Setting your evaluation criteria

Consider the environmental, social and economic aspects of your project, or you could think about them as planet, people and profit.

Consider how you will evaluate each aspect, what relevant and proportionate measures could be used and, how you would communicate the data to your colleagues and external stakeholders.

When evaluating you may want to pose a simple set of questions such as the below, then use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the project:

- **What was achieved from an environmental, social and economic perspective?**
- **What resources did it take? This could be financial and/or people (contractors and staff).**
- **What were the challenges and successes? This could be a simple narrative based on how the project or programme went.**

Consider using a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate your project. We explore the options in this section.

Environmental evaluation
Consider the metrics which were used in the benchmarking section of your project and consider which of these would provide a usable metric which can be communicated throughout your organisation, up to senior managers and to colleagues. You may want to use a variety of measurements based on your audiences.

Social evaluation
Social evaluation can take numerous forms and links with the benchmarking milestone and the resident engagement milestone. Below are some methods of social evaluation and, where appropriate some examples of methodologies which could be used to evaluate the social impact of green spaces.

Resident value
Evaluation is worth considering when planning your broader resident engagement approach which you will have considered in the engagement milestone. Consider mechanisms which can be used to measure resident feedback on the project or programme. Are there any existing channels or surveys already being used by your organisation which can be used to get feedback? For example, annual resident surveys or, resident panels and community groups which you engage with regularly? Ensure early engagement ahead of the project to maximise buy-in from residents and other stakeholders. You could also consider surveying people while they are at a residents meeting or local event and/or consider incentivising participation.

Surveying is a popular approach to evaluating resident feedback on green spaces. We have included some example questions in Appendix 2. When building your approach consider the resources required to complete and review questionnaires, collate answers and formulate feedback. It is also worth considering accessibility and inclusivity of the questionnaires and any events you are holding.

When designing your questions consider the outputs and whether the questions are simple and measurable before, during and after the project to enable comparability. Resident engagement teams may be able to help with providing guidance on designing a bespoke questionnaire for your organisation.

Workshops are another option for evaluating resident feedback. Make sure that you have the appropriate resources to effectively run a workshop at each stage of the project where it is required and consider the content of the workshop carefully including the time of day and location where it is held to ensure inclusivity and maximises attendance.

Social value
Social value is the broader understanding of value. It's moving away from using money as the sole indicator of value and puts emphasis on the additional benefits which can be delivered.

Our benchmarking milestone included a number of tools to measure social value that you could use. Your organisation may already be using the HACT social value metric for other activities. If this is the case then you could engage with the relevant teams to find out whether the metric can be expanded to capture the social value from the green space improvement as part of their existing measurements or calculations. This can then be included in your evaluations.

The value of green spaces on health and wellbeing is being increasingly documented and researched. The Public Health England, improving access to green space (2020) report provides guidance on barriers to accessing green spaces and ways to ensure equitable access to green spaces for communities. Some of the aspects in the report could be formed into questions for the survey referenced previously to determine whether the green space improvement has been successful from a health and wellbeing perspective.

There may be the opportunity to connect with your local NHS provider to find out whether they are running any green social prescribing projects locally and how you can connect with their work.

You may also find it helpful to look at the Fields in Trust Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces report 2018- an extract of which is below. Revaluing-Parks-and-Green-Spaces-Summary.pdf (fieldsintrust.org).



The Total Economic Value to an individual is £30.24 per year (£2.52 per month), and includes benefits gained from using their local park or green space and non-use benefits such as the preservation of parks for future generation.



The Wellbeing Value associated with the frequent use of local parks and green spaces is worth £34.2 billion per year to the entire UK adult population.



Parks and green spaces are estimated to save the NHS around £111 million per year based solely on a reduction in GP visits and excluding any additional savings from prescribing or referrals

Value	Description	Low	Central	High	Unit
Air pollution (NOx)	National average damage cost values	£681	£7,120	£26,995	per tonne of Air pollution pollutant
Air pollution pollutant (PM2.5)		£17,716	£81,847	£253,474	
Air pollutant removal by vegetation	Welfare/health benefit of reduced air pollution from vegetation	£17	-	£931	per hectare (various land covers)
Noise	Marginal change in road noise levels	£13	-	£227	per 1 decibel change
Noise reduction by vegetation	Average road noise damage costs avoided for households benefiting from noise mitigation by urban woodland	-	£96	-	per household
Nature based recreation	Welfare value of outdoor recreation sites	£48	-	£120,067	per hectare (various land covers)
Physical health benefits from nature	Indicative health savings / benefits from every physically active visit to green space	£3.36	-	£14.34	per marginal physically active visit to greenspace
Local amenity	Average additional value per property within 100m - 500m of accessible green or blue space	£1,538	£3,076	£9,471	per property (capital value)
Visual amenity	Average price premium for a property with a view over green or blue space	-	£6,164	-	
Loss of amenity	Welfare cost from significant litter accumulation in residential areas	£20	-		per household

Summary of environmental values, and land value uplift

Economic evaluation

The economic aspects of benchmarking can be used to demonstrate success from a financial perspective. This is covered by the benchmarking milestone.

There are also several un-monetisable benefits which can be quantified using the Green Book's environmental table on the left. This table can help with calculating the financial benefit of aspects like improved air quality from the enhancement of green spaces and increases to nature-based recreation resulting from improvements.

3. Verification and certification

An organisation may consider external verification or certification to provide an external perspective on the condition of an outdoor space or progress against an organisational target. This may provide confidence to customers, local community groups and any potential funders of the works in question.

There are currently a small selection of standards you may consider. You may also decide to work with a specialist consultancy or non-governmental organisation for a more bespoke assessment of delivery of your programme.

Currently all of the existing standards summarisedon the next page are predominantly focused on individual site assessments. Assessing the delivery of larger-scale programmes may require a sample-approach using one or more of these standards or a bespoke solution.

Certification	Description
Building with Nature	These standards provide planners and developers with evidence-based, how-to, guidance on delivering high-quality green infrastructure. Building with Nature is predominantly focused on new build developments though the standards could readily be applied to improving existing outdoor spaces as well.
Green Flag Award	The Green Flag Award scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces, setting a benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces. Only green spaces accessible to the public are eligible and every site would require a detailed management plan.
Biodiversity Benchmark – The Wildlife Trusts	This standard is focused on certifying managing of a business' landholdings specifically for wildlife. It is aligned to the ISO14001 environmental management standard but does require ecological surveys and management following a Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of continual improvement.

Tips to success

Hurdles	Solutions
There are too many metrics to choose from.	Don't over complicate things. Choose a small number of evaluation methods that will be meaningful and resonate with your organisation and identified stakeholders.
Evaluation is too costly and we don't have time.	Consider the different resources you have available including residents and supply chain partners. You can consider how often you will measure things and how long this will take to focus on evaluation not being burdensome.
I'm not sure how to use the evaluation information obtained.	Ensure the information you obtain from evaluation doesn't get filed and never seen again! This is important information that can help to secure funding, use as evidence for engagement, adapt your approach and learn lessons. Consider sharing this information with others so we can all benefit.





5. Conclusion

In the face of unprecedented challenges, from climate change and biodiversity loss to the growing need for social housing, the importance of green spaces cannot be overstated. This Green Space Model presents a compelling case for reimagining and reinventing the way we approach these areas, highlighting their profound impact on our planet, communities, and individual well-being.

As we reflect on the dire statistics that reveal a world in crisis, it is clear that addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach. We must not only tackle climate change but also recognise that our future is intrinsically linked to the health of our natural world. Green spaces are the bridges between these two critical issues, offering us the opportunity to simultaneously mitigate environmental challenges, enhance public health, and promote social cohesion.

The path laid out in this model guides us through essential milestones, from engaging with our communities and benchmarking the state of our green spaces to creating comprehensive plans and securing partnerships and funding.

It emphasises that every social landlord, despite the constraints of capacity, costs, and resources, can play a pivotal role in enhancing green spaces and contributing to the restoration and protection of nature.



Furthermore, this model transcends mere environmental and social benefits; it is a roadmap to bolstering the economic and governance aspects of social housing. By embracing these principles, social landlords can create value for their residents and communities, aligning their efforts with the ever-evolving demands of environmental, social, health and governance (ESHG) considerations.

The case is clear, the roadmap is set, and the opportunities are abundant. As we read about the success stories of those who have embraced green spaces and transformed their surroundings, we are reminded that change is not only possible but also necessary. Protecting the environment has become a central concern for the majority of the population, and green spaces offer a tangible way for us to address this concern collectively.

In 2022, 86% of people declared their commitment to protecting the environment, and it's time to turn that commitment into action. Our green spaces are not just patches of land; they are the lifeblood of our world. Let us invest in their future, for the planet, for our communities, and for the generations to come. Together, we can unleash the potential of green spaces to heal our planet, connect our communities, and yield economic prosperity. The power to make a difference lies within each and every one of us.

See more

See the **tools, sources and case studies** that we recommend you look at relating to engaging with your communities.

Appendix 1: More detail on benchmarking

When identifying metrics to incorporate into your benchmarking, you may wish to align with existing frameworks such as Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework. This covers the why, what and how of good green infrastructure and as such provides a good range of ideas for measuring the quality and condition of green spaces and their use.

Principle	Possible metrics
Nature-rich beautiful places.	Habitat condition; biodiversity index; urban tree cover; % green cover.
Active and healthy places.	Number of regular users; user demographic characteristics (BAME, disability, etc.); wellbeing survey results .
Thriving and prosperous places.	Number of recreational spaces; events.
Improved water management.	Nutrient neutrality score; flood incidence.
Resilient and climate positive places.	Flood risk; number of trees; CO_2 sequestered.



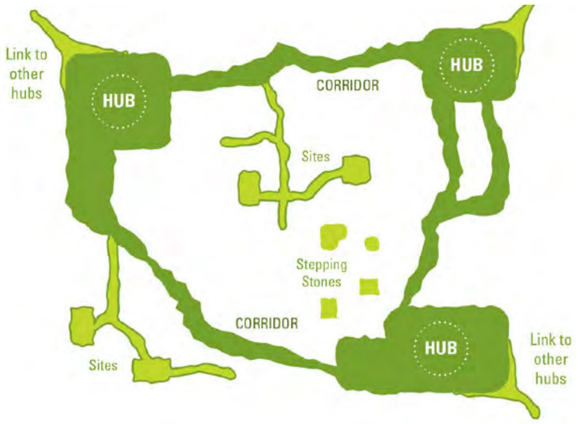
Improving our green spaces from an environmental perspective involves increasing the variety of wildlife species – referred to as biodiversity. There are range of ways for us to measure this from in-depth ecological surveys to a habitat condition survey.

Habitat condition	Ecological survey
Assesses the type, area and condition of different habitats for a given green space.	Identifies the specific species of a given green space to determine a more accurate insight into biodiversity.
Requires minimal training to perform.	May require an ecologist of significant training.
Requires GIS mapping tool to define habitat zones.	May not require the same extent of GIS mapping in advance as this could be performed during the survey.
Generally more affordable given minimal training and time required on a given site.	Likely to be significantly more expensive.
Can be performed relatively quickly using a site walk and desktop assessment.	Will likely require multiple site visits and/or monitoring equipment.
Will not be able to determine the actual biodiversity of a location.	Will create a more accurate picture of the species inhabiting a green space.
May translate better into grounds maintenance specifications, which are often based on habitat type.	Can provide grounds maintenance contractors with detailed species identification and location data to ensure compliance obligations are met.

Green space connectivity

Those completing surveys can check how a green space connects with a wider network of other spaces. A ‘green oasis’ that is disconnected from other habitats is unlikely to support a high degree of biodiversity and may be a less desirable target for your improvement programme as a result, if biodiversity is a key metric you are targeting.









Appendix 2: Survey questions

Question 1

What street, area, or estate do you live on?

Question 2

Please tell us how you would rate your local outdoor spaces (where 0 is very poor and 10 is exceptional).

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Question 3

Please tell us in a few words why you selected this score.

Question 4

How often do you use the outdoor space next to your home?

Daily Weekly Monthly Yearly Never

Question 5

Please tell us how you use the outdoor space on your estate.

Dog walking Exercise Enjoying nature and wildlife Recreation Something else

Question 6

How abundant would you say wildlife is where you live?

Very abundant Somewhat abundant Not very abundant Not at all abundant

Question 7

When thinking about the proposed improvements to your outdoor spaces, what do you like?

Question 8

When thinking about the proposed improvements to your outdoor spaces, what would you change?

Question 9

Please provide your email address if you would like to be kept informed of progress with this project or would like to volunteer to support the improvements themselves.

We will only use your details for these purposes and will delete them when requested by yourself or at conclusion of this project.



Thank you

Special thanks to Ground Control for sponsoring the Green Space Advisory Board and publication of this model

Website: www.ground-control.co.uk/gsab/

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