

Nature at work

Liverpool City Region
and Warrington Green
Infrastructure Framework

Summary



www.merseyforest.org.uk/nature-at-work





Photograph credit: David McLeavy

Cities across the globe are catching on to a vital concept: that a green infrastructure approach can help deliver a range of benefits essential to our way of life, including attracting investment, safeguarding jobs and supporting growth, managing air and water quality and boosting health and wellbeing.

Green infrastructure is our life support system – the green lungs and arteries provided by our woodlands, farmland, street trees, parks, rivers and canals. Accounting for around 80% of the land area, 8,000 jobs and £350 million GVA across Liverpool City Region and Warrington, green infrastructure is by no means an afterthought; its wider economic value has been estimated at over £100bn per annum. It's clear that green infrastructure is pivotal to a successful and sustainable future.

Liverpool City Region and Warrington is already recognised globally for its green infrastructure planning and delivery. We have used this expertise to create this framework: reinforcing the value of green infrastructure assets, and integrating green infrastructure thinking into our policies and future practice.

This framework can help us sharpen up our strategies, proof-check our policies, and ensure smarter green decision-making in the future. It is for everyone to use and all to benefit from, and is critical to the prosperity and future of our city region. Only by using the evidence base contained within the framework, and by investing in nature, can we bank on our natural assets to deliver the benefits we need to grow and succeed.

What is green infrastructure?

Green infrastructure is the ‘green’ between the ‘grey’; the farmland, open spaces, parks, trees, woodlands, coast, river and canals found right across our city region and that provide a natural environment in which to live, work and play.

Why GI?

It’s not overstating the case to say that green infrastructure underpins the entire economy. As we strive for a knowledge-based, high tech, low carbon, more equal and more sustainable economy, the role of green infrastructure is critical.

In terms of delivering economic value, green infrastructure can have a number of benefits:

- **Direct** – jobs and business development related to the creation and management of green infrastructure
- **Indirect** – green infrastructure creating the setting for jobs and investment, and providing the raw materials or basis for other businesses
- **Reducing cost** – using a green infrastructure approach to provide savings in areas such as public health
- **Reducing risk** – using green infrastructure to help mitigate or adapt for a given risk (such as climate change)



The big six

Through extensive consultation, six priorities for green infrastructure have been agreed:

-  Growth and investment
-  Health and wellbeing
-  Recreation, leisure and tourism
-  Rural economy
-  Ecological framework
-  Climate change



Growth and investment



Attractive, high quality places attract skills and capital – and green infrastructure plays a critical role in setting the scene for this growth and investment. Green Infrastructure can also help to overcome barriers to investment, so called ‘pinch points’ enabling sustainable development.

Surveys have shown that green infrastructure adds value to commercial property. In fact, 95% of property developers would be willing to pay at least 3% more to be near open space. Coupled with this, 98% of people believe that trees and green spaces can improve the appearance of a town and have been found to increase land and property prices by 7-18%.

Health and wellbeing



Higher levels of green infrastructure can lead to improved physical and mental health and help reduce health inequalities. That’s not only good news for our wellbeing, it can also save the UK economy around £500 million every year in reduced NHS costs.

It’s important that green space is close and accessible – a recent Natural England study showed that people who live furthest from public parks were 27% more likely to be overweight or obese. NICE guidance also suggests that increasing physical activity can help to prevent or manage over 20 conditions and diseases including coronary heart disease, diabetes and obesity. So, promoting healthy lifestyles is key – whether that’s encouraging people to walk to the shops, cycle to work or take their children to the park. The Green Infrastructure Framework sets out how we can develop our ‘Natural Health Service’ to support better health for our communities.



Recreation, leisure and tourism



Liverpool City Region and Warrington have a wealth of natural assets that attract visitors. From Sefton Coast to Halewood Triangle, Sefton Park to Bold Forest Park, Runcorn Heath and Risley Moss to the Dee Estuary – many of our open spaces are truly beautiful. Around 90% of people believe that parks and open spaces improve their quality of life, and with over 2.6 billion visits every year, urban parks are an incredible public resource.

Over the past 20 years access to woodland in particular has increased significantly in the city region and Warrington. Our Green Infrastructure Framework has identified areas that, due to climate and demographic change, will come under increasing pressure from recreation, leisure and tourism.

Some of our strongest tourism brands are based on the quality of the natural environment. Our Framework identifies how green infrastructure planning and delivery can assist in achieving the city region aspirations for the tourism economy, providing high quality venues and attractions and the setting for the wider visitor economy.

Rural economy



Covering 58% of the area and accounting for 22% of Merseyside’s GVA, the rural economy is a crucial part of the green infrastructure framework. It provides valuable fuel and food resources as well as providing the setting for a high-tech, knowledge-based economy. There’s also economic opportunity tied to climate change adaptation. The ICEP and Mersey Leader programmes in the city region have demonstrated the capacity of the sector to generate new jobs and improve rural business productivity.

Natural tourism is also an important element of rural diversification. Every year, UK residents who visit the countryside contribute around £5.5 billion to the English economy and support over 350,000 full time jobs. So, our green and pleasant surroundings are important for job creation and economic vibrancy as well as providing a beautiful backdrop to our towns and cities.



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Ecological framework



An area rich in biodiversity is likely to be more resilient in the face of a wide range of climate, economic, demographic and ecological challenges. Delivering the Green Infrastructure Framework can create larger, more connected, better-managed habitats and wildlife corridors to increase biodiversity.

There are many, many ways to both safeguard and improve biodiversity. Take honeybees for example. The value of crops pollinated by honeybees in England is approximately £117 million. Green infrastructure can support a higher diversity of species, including honeybees, which in turn leads to increased long-term productivity of the countryside. And it's not just the insects that benefit – work by Landlife in Liverpool highlighted that developing wildflower areas along verges makes place generally look more attractive, so people feel better about their area and take care of it that little bit more, and that can in turn encourage further investment... you could say it's a virtuous circle.

Climate change



Planning and delivery of green infrastructure has been identified as an effective and 'no regrets' action to help towns and cities adapt to projected climate change.

Increasing green infrastructure locally by just 10% can counter the 'urban heat island' effect, keeping city centre temperatures at comfortable levels and reducing heat stress. Areas of the city region with populations most vulnerable to long periods of high temperatures have been identified and their need for green infrastructure assessed. Green infrastructure also contributes to flood alleviation through its capacity to store and slow water and in urban areas through Sustainable Urban Drainage System – trees over hard surfaces can reduce run-off by 60%, with grassland the figure rises to nearly 100%. And as for the role of carbon sequestration, grassland, trees, plants and soil also store carbon – giving them a vital role in mitigating climate change.

Call to action

We know that the benefits of green infrastructure are wide-ranging and there for the taking – and integrating green infrastructure into our future plans is a very real possibility.

Everyone can take up the green infrastructure baton – from developers, businesses and local authority departments to individual households and neighbourhood groups.

Nature can work for all of us, and we can all use this framework to build green infrastructure into what we do, how we live, how we work and how we plan for the future.

Key activities

To achieve our six key priorities, we have also identified the activities that need to take place at a city region level – activities that will make sure green infrastructure is embraced in all our plans, strategies, proposals and schemes.

Plan and deliver green infrastructure to help overcome 'pinch points' that undermine investment potential.

Engage the non-environmental sector more effectively through the Local Nature Partnership and Local Enterprise Partnership link and Community Environment Fund.

Use green infrastructure to help adapt our area to projected climate change and assist in the creation of a low carbon economy.

Support the aspiration for the Mersey as the cleanest and most ecologically rich urban river in Europe.

Use the green infrastructure of the city region and Warrington to promote and sell the area as a great place to live, work and invest. Use it to help bid for Green Capital.

Deliver The Mersey Forest Plan, increasing woodland cover in areas of greatest need, deliver 'more from trees' and achieve a 'woodland culture'.

Use the Green Infrastructure Framework to shape the content and delivery of European Structural and Rural Development Funds.

Fully utilise Green Infrastructure Planning, delivery and management to reduce health inequalities, promote positive wellbeing and reduce the prevalence of poor mental and physical health in support of the Decade of Health and Wellbeing.

Build the Green Infrastructure Framework into city region and cross boundary plans and strategies.

Create and develop green infrastructure tourism assets, for example our coastal areas, large parks, greenways such as Sankey Valley and the Forest Parks.

Through green infrastructure planning and delivery enhance the ecological framework through creation of more and bigger areas for nature that are well managed and connected to form an ecological network.

Use the green infrastructure assets of the city region and Warrington to support increased active travel, walking and cycling for work, recreation and leisure.

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