THE STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES IN DETAIL

1. MAKE STRONG CONNECTIONS

The need for better connections crosses many areas – biodiversity networks and sustainable transport, as well as planning and delivering green infrastructure across boundaries and across sectors.

3.32   Green infrastructure, appropriately planned, can create a connected network which is essential for both people and wildlife.

3.33   Access routes are used for both travel and for recreation. A 'green travel' network, prioritising pedestrians and cyclists at the human scale, reduces congestion and has a positive economic impact (an issue, for example, in the South Coast towns). Properly planned access networks can provide primary routes connected to secondary networks, linking into local communities, to railway stations and 'visitor hubs'. Local networks connect people to the places they need to get to, be it parks, schools or shops; and attractive and safe routes can encourage a modal shift from cars to more sustainable and healthy forms of transport.

3.34   Strategic planning for nature conservation at the landscape scale is essential to manage pressures on biodiversity to restore ecological networks. The Natural Environment White Paper (2011), taking the conclusions from '*Making Space for Nature*',[121] advocates that high quality wildlife reservoirs, such as designated nature conservation sites, should be linked at a landscape scale. The multiple benefits from green infrastructure offer opportunities to increase biodiversity value in a planned manner to support the creation of such landscape scale networks.

3.35   Green infrastructure also offers particular opportunities to bring nature into urban centres, not only making urban areas better for wildlife, but also allowing people to come into contact with nature.

3.36   Rivers and watercourses are themselves natural connectors across the landscape, providing routes for nature and people. These can be on a strategic scale, as in the major river corridors highlighted in the Natural Capital Investment Areas, or on a more local scale e.g. the planning of swales and attenuation ponds in a sustainable drainage scheme.

3.37   To deliver these networks properly requires co-ordinated working and planning at both the local and the strategic scale, understanding the needs and assessing the opportunities and embedding this into delivery plans and policy.

WHAT IS NEEDED

3.38   Strategic planning and delivery – Assess the needs and opportunities, planning and delivering these across administrative boundaries;

3.39   A cross-sector approach to connections between towns and villages and the countryside – considering access, landscape, wildlife and rivers, not just one aspect in isolation;

3.40   Better access connections around towns and from the towns to the countryside. These need to be planned to deliver maximum benefits and using the opportunities provided by new development to improve local networks;

3.41   Better connection between access and biodiversity to ensure that recreation can be managed without causing undue pressure to the biodiversity resource;

3.42   Breaking down access barriers – main roads (e.g. A27), rivers and railway lines all disconnect the network;

121 J. H. Lawton et al (2010), *Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network.*

3.43 Improve ecological connectivity – Improvement of this key underpinning ecosystem service needs to be 'mainstreamed' and incorporated into all other areas and at all scales. There is connectivity modelling evidence, but this is not co- ordinated and duplicates effort;

3.44 Working together – Fundamentally these networks do not operate within current administrative boundaries. Developing this will require local authorities to look beyond their boundaries.

2. A NATURAL AND CULTURAL CANVAS

The well-being of the area fundamentally relies on the quality of the landscape, its ecosystems and the services they provide. The natural landscape and cultural heritage should be strengthened and celebrated, providing distinctive settings for its cities, towns and villages and underpinning the future prosperity of the area.

3.45 Landscape, heritage and biodiversity form the canvas upon which everything else is laid. Encapsulated in each of these are our past uses of the land and this, in turn, shapes the current landscape.

3.46 The South Downs National Park and AONBs are afforded protection for their high landscape value, but there are pressures acting on them. The views from and to the Downs, areas of tranquillity unaffected by the intrusion of noise and the experience of viewing the dark night skies are all qualities which need to be retained.

3.47 Urban areas and the edges of the protected landscapes are under pressure from incremental degradation; and small pockets of tranquillity close to urban areas are precious local assets which need to be identified and retained.

3.48 The prosperity of the region also lies in the quality of its natural capital and the functioning of ecosystem services. Integrated spatial planning can help to deliver multiple ecosystem services. While this Network references ecosystem services, more needs to be done to implement the ecosystem service approach and integrate this into green infrastructure planning across the Network area.

3.49 Woodlands can provide many functions and are integral to the landscape character of many part of the Network area. They provide ecosystem services including timber, carbon storage, heat, air pollution and noise regulation. They soften the landscape intrusion at the edge of urban areas and make the urban centre more liveable.

WHAT IS NEEDED

- Maintain and strengthen landscape character by the consideration of the landscape setting in proposals for new developments and associated infrastructure, in order to support the integration of new development within its landscape; in particular in the areas outside the National Park where small- scale and gradual changes may be altering the landscape.

- Making more extensive use of tools including Viewshed to ensure the visual impacts on the landscape of developments are considered;

- New woodland landscapes and improved woodland management; to address the fragmentation of ancient woodlands and historic landscapes, to provide new landscapes and recreation opportunities and to develop co-operative schemes that make the use of timber products more viable through pooled resources and markets[122] and urban tree-planting programmes to improve green infrastructure in urban areas;

- A better understanding of ecosystem services and the role of both natural and urban landscapes in providing and demanding services;

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122 As set out in policies 17 to 22 of the National Park Management Plan: *There is significant potential to increase the economic value of forestry within the National Park … Wood for construction in particular, would bring many benefits for biodiversity, a sustainable construction industry, and support the local vernacular. This could increase demand for wood and reduce the demand for minerals for construction…. aim to improve the viability of the forestry sector by creating business clusters, developing supply chains and improving networks including links to universities and centres of expertise, especially within the renewables sector. footnote 1* **southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/national-park-local-plan/evidence-and-supporting-documents/viewshed-analysis/**

- Keeping special places in the landscape; by identifying tranquil areas and places where dark skies and stars can be seen; and mapping key viewpoints (see below);
- Recognising and celebrating the rich cultural heritage of the landscape through the development and delivery of green infrastructure;

The National Park Authority has completed a View Characterisation and Analysis Study to map and analyse the views to, from and within the National Park. This work sits alongside the South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (SDILCA) to provide evidence on views and provides a visual way into understanding the SDILCA, making it more accessible to more people.

3. SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

The health and well-being of people living in the Network area is linked to the quality of their environment. People need access to nature and the benefits of a green environment. New development must build communities, not just housing. This is vital for the health of the towns and villages and contributes to the economic prosperity of the area.

3.50 The natural environment provides physical, mental and social well-being benefits; and this is now well-evidenced and documented. Not only does access to greenspace improve people's quality of life, it reduces economic burdens through improving health. Bringing nature into towns and villages also helps people feel more connected to their environment.

3.51 The idea of creating greener environments in our towns and cities is not new. People prefer to live in greener, healthy towns and villages and this is reflected in increased house prices. However, everyone should have access to greenspaces, but it is those who suffer most deprivation who may have the greatest need and have the lowest levels of greenspace available to them.

3.52 The natural environment can also provide health benefits through improving air quality and regulating noise and temperature, as well as reducing the impacts of extreme events such as flooding, which negatively impact on people's welfare.

3.53 Development pressures and scarcity of land have resulted in the fragmentation of green infrastructure in some of our towns and villages; and plans for the creation of new greenspace in existing areas can be difficult to achieve. The quantity and quality of green space is often insufficient for local needs, or inaccessible due

to physical barriers, distance to travel or for cultural reasons. For people in poor health or with disabilities the difficulties of accessing open space can be even greater; and local greenspace within easy reach can be even more important.

WHAT IS NEEDED

- Provide more greenspace in areas of deficit, especially those areas which are also suffering from poor health or deprivation;
- As an absolute, do not create further disadvantage in areas already lacking in greenspace where there is also social and economic need;
- Ensure that new housing development adequately contributes to the provision of greenspace (at a scale appropriate to the development) in order to build communities not just housing;
- Increase the benefits and quality of existing greenspaces in areas of deficit, for example by allowing access to additional land to make better use of strategic gaps and urban fringe land, incorporating more wildlife interest, improving paths and increasing play space and ensuring high levels of maintenance;
- Bring nature into the urban areas – more wildlife in existing parks and greenspaces,

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better urban connections, naturalising and de-culverting rivers and streams;[123]

■ Use green infrastructure in a planned way to combat environmental detractors – to reduce noise pollution and improve air quality.

4. BECOME FIT FOR THE FUTURE

The Network area needs to build resilience to help it adapt to change. Housing growth and transport will continue to make demands on the landscape. Climate change will create pressures and challenges which will require adaptation. Economic forces will test farming and forestry. Greater demands will be placed on water resources, which will need to be in good condition and well-managed for future generations. The management of this complex list of challenges requires forward planning to view the medium and long term horizons.

3.54 Climate change will bring challenges and apply pressures on the landscape in the coming decades, with the potential to change coastal land, habitats and land uses. The changing conditions and demands may provide opportunities as well as challenges, such as a move to renewable energy resources and new crops.

3.55 Species and habitats are sensitive to changes in temperature and rainfall, requiring actions to conserve existing biodiversity, reduce sources of harm not linked to climate change and strengthen ecological networks. In addition, pests and diseases will have an effect on trees and other species and it will be important to plant resilient tree species as part of a plan to re-stock in the face of decline of particular species.

3.56 The increase in temperatures in larger urban areas will exacerbate respiratory and cardiovascular conditions, compounded through the interaction with air pollution. However, the natural environment can make an important contribution to regulating the local climate and reducing impacts.

3.57 For the water environment, despite some uncertainties, climate change is likely to lead to increases in the amount of winter rain falling in heavy downpours, along with a decrease in summer rainfall. This will necessitate flood water storage and methods to slow down run-off. Green infrastructure techniques (such as SUDS) and the development of multi-functional landscapes can play an important role in managing water flows.

3.58 Natural England's report on the potential consequences of climate change on the South Downs National Park[124] reinforces the role of green infrastructure in adapting to the effects of climate change.

3.59 Aside from climate change, water resources are also under pressure from abstraction and suffering from declining quality; 24% of river and 81% of groundwater is at/probably at risk from abstraction and flow regulation.[125] Demand for water will increase due to housing growth, aside from rising demand from climate change. Green infrastructure has an important role to play in reducing water demand, in preserving quality of water resources, both in watercourses and aquifers and in helping to regulate extreme flows through re- naturalising watercourses and catchment measures such as upstream planting.

WHAT IS NEEDED

■ Address future urban heating by action now to plant trees to reduce heating effects and provide shade – in parks, streets, public areas

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123 Also known as 'daylighting'; **http://evidence.environment-agency.gov.uk/FCERM/en/FluvialDesignGuide/Chapter8.aspx?pagenum=4** and **https://www.ciwem.org/assets/pdf/Policy/Policy%20Position%20Statement/Deculverting-of-water-courses.pdf**

124 Assessing the potential consequences of climate change for England's landscapes: the South Downs National Park – Natural England – September 2013.

125 Environment Agency (2009), South East River Basin Management Plan, Annex H: Adapting to Climate Change.

and schools and as an essential part of new commercial developments;

- Ensure that water resources can support the growing population by reducing demand and improving quality;

- Use natural solutions to regulate water flow, through catchment planting, creation of wetlands and re-naturalising watercourses;

- Improve habitat and species connectivity to adapt to climate change (through implementing actions contained under other Principles).

5. BETTER WORKING TOGETHER

Partnership working, shared objectives, pooling knowledge, securing resources and advocacy will be the keys to success for the Network and its ambitions.

3.60   Green infrastructure needs champions; advocates who can make case for green infrastructure, who understand the local and wider benefits and the implications of not putting this essential infrastructure in place. This is particularly important now, as cuts in local government funding have badly affected the resourcing of green infrastructure for both capital projects and grounds maintenance. There is a growing reliance on new development to provide green infrastructure; either directly on-site, or by development contributions for off-site

enhancements. Scarce resources mean that green infrastructure has to take its place on a list of other infrastructure requirements associated with new development; and the case for green infrastructure may be out-weighed by others and the opportunities to develop green infrastructure are lost.

3.61   Local green infrastructure planning may relate to specific developments or single issues, but the beauty of green infrastructure is how it can interconnect with a range of issues and provide a much wider range of benefits than may be initially apparent. This is one of the reasons why green infrastructure planning is best done at a strategic level and across administrative boundaries. A strategic approach requires partners from across authorities and from different sectors and organisations to come together to share knowledge and to plan a way forward around common goals.

3.62   Local planning authorities are key decision-makers in the development of green infrastructure. A good understanding of green infrastructure and an appreciation of its many benefits are vital for green infrastructure to be prioritised in planning decisions. Some work may be required to support planning officers and councillors in their knowledge and understanding of green infrastructure.

3.63   Green infrastructure also needs resources. It is clear that government funding at all levels is

diminishing and the reliance on new development to bring green infrastructure plans forward is not fool-proof. Work is needed to develop funding strategies for green infrastructure – to look in different areas, in different sectors and at different scales.

WHAT IS NEEDED:

- Bringing together coalitions of organisations based around common needs e.g. coastal communities;

- To identify potential advocates who can make the case for green infrastructure at all levels and to different – and influential – audiences;

- Pilot projects to take green infrastructure planning, development and/or delivery projects forward to demonstrate the approach and its benefits, not least in economic terms;

- Opportunities for planners and local politicians to better understand green infrastructure and its role in sustainable development;

- An assessment of the potential for working with new sectors and sourcing new funds.

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