

3. THE NETWORK GUIDELINES

*Playing at sunset, Devils Dyke
© SDNPA/Rhian White*

HEADLINES

3.1 Evaluation of the evidence has highlighted some key and headline issues across the Network area. These findings strongly reconfirm the need for the Network partners to continue to work together and to build on the approach developed to date.

A FUNDAMENTALLY INTER-RELATED AREA

3.2 The process of developing this Network has revealed very clearly how inter-related the area is. Exert pressure in one area and the effect will also manifest itself in another area. Lack of greenspace in one area, for example, can result in more pressure on greenspaces in other areas, perhaps with unforeseen consequences such as a reduction in biodiversity. There are many more examples which have been highlighted through this document.

3.3 It is in the interests of all partners to acknowledge this – and then understand it better and plan to address it. The National Park must manage and adapt to the increased pressures placed on it by a growing population in order to protect its Special Qualities. The areas outside the National Park must also accommodate this

growth while building vibrant, healthy and sustainable communities. Working to deliver these in tandem will bring benefits to all partners, to the landscapes and natural assets across the Network area and, importantly, all residents.

3.4 This raises particular issues and needs for all partners, with a direct synergy between these needs. This synergy reveals itself in several key areas.

THE NEED FOR CONNECTIVITY

3.5 The need to make links is a common thread running through a range of green infrastructure-related issues:

- There is a need to join up fragmented areas of habitat to improve biodiversity and support landscape resilience;
- Addressing gaps in the access network;
- Working across landscapes and not local authority boundaries, necessitating cross-boundary and cross-sectoral working for mutual benefit;
- Planning green infrastructure at river catchment scale and identifying a range of multi-functional

benefits including improvements to water quality and riverside landscapes.

ADDRESSING DEFICITS IN EXISTING GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION

3.6 Based upon the Accessible Natural Greenspace (ANG) standards,¹²⁰ the provision of accessible greenspace and green areas is insufficient for the identified need in many places, particularly outside the National Park. In addition many partner local authorities are facing increasing pressures on their ability to both retain these sites and to manage them.

3.7 The provision of green infrastructure associated with new development is a key opportunity to provide new greenspace and help redress the deficiency. However, without a policy network and local political support, this opportunity will be missed.

SOCIAL EQUALITY

3.8 There is a link between communities in poor health, high levels of social or economic deprivation and lack of high quality greenspace. This is the situation for a number of places in the Network area where significant levels of

¹²⁰ LUC, May 2008. Understanding the relevance and application of the Access to Natural Green Space Standard

growth are planned, bringing the pressures of development and its associated infrastructure, pollution and noise. Unless the issues affecting the communities in these places are addressed, including raising the standard and provision of greenspace and green infrastructure, the effect of new development will be to make the situation worse for these communities.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

3.9 The environment is facing a number of pressures including climate change, built development and urbanisation, recreation demand and intensification of agriculture.

3.10 The effects of climate change are already apparent and include more storms and flooding, periods of drought and more pests and diseases (e.g. the implications of ash dieback on the green infrastructure of the South Downs area is significant).

3.11 Green infrastructure planning at the network area scale is needed to identify areas under pressure, the factors involved and actions required to strengthen the landscape, restore key features and join up fragmented habitats.

URBAN EDGE PRESSURES

3.12 Across the Network area there are examples of urban-edge landscapes under pressure. This is particularly evident along the

southern boundary of the National Park. The causes vary, but include:

- Recreation pressure as a result of lack of alternative greenspace;
 - Changes in the farmed landscape (e.g. fragmentation of farmsteads and conversion to residential uses, with associated gardens and paddocks);
 - Gaps in the access network;
 - Loss of strategic gaps;
 - Poor or fragmented management and uncertain ownership;
 - Encroachment of built development;
 - Barriers to access e.g. major roads and railways severing the landscape and isolating pockets of land;
- 3.13** The pressures manifest themselves as:
- Declining biodiversity condition;
 - Urbanisation of the landscape including an increase in 'horsiculture' (i.e. the keeping of horses on the urban edge in a network of open paddocks, usually with little boundary definition);
 - Urban edge anti-social issues (such as fly-tipping);
 - The gradual degradation of landscape quality; in particular along the boundary of the National Park.

THE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER

3.14 Green infrastructure needs to be planned at the strategic level and delivered locally. At present there is no strategic approach to green infrastructure across the Network area, although priorities are identified by the SDNPA at the National Park scale, albeit for initiatives within the National Park boundary.

3.15 The Network presents an opportunity for partners to work together to agree their priorities and shared objectives. Working across boundaries will enable the pooling and sharing of knowledge and joint approaches to securing resources.

3.16 Another key area where the partners need to work together is in advocacy. The significance and value of green infrastructure will not be fully recognised or appreciated by decision-makers unless and until it attracts champions who can make the case at senior levels. There are many existing partnerships and initiatives developing projects that support green infrastructure. These partnerships, with their established networks and local knowledge, are ideally placed to deliver on other local green infrastructure initiatives. The potential value of locally based schemes could clearly be enhanced if they can also contribute to a network of green infrastructure planning at a strategic scale.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING

LOCAL PLANNING AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE POLICY

3.17 Local Plans are crucial to the successful development of green infrastructure. Of the 14 planning authorities across the Network area, currently only four have complete, up-to-date and adopted Plans, with many others being developed.

3.18 A specific green infrastructure policy and Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) informed by up-to-date evidence are essential components of a planned green infrastructure approach. There are some good examples of elements of this approach across the authorities in the Network area, but the general picture is piecemeal.

3.19 While it is the prerogative of each local authority to progress green infrastructure planning in a way which suits their needs, the variation in approaches to green infrastructure in local planning is not helpful in promoting and resourcing green infrastructure. If there is a lack of a sound evidence base, this does not encourage

local contributions to the development of strategic green infrastructure assets.

ACCOMMODATING GROWTH

3.20 The National Park and the surrounding Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cover half (49%) of the Network area. It is clear from the locations of planned major development sites shown in Plan 4 that significant housing growth will, necessarily, be focused in the areas outside of these designated landscapes. There are further constraints in the Network area due to potential recreational pressure on Natura 2000 Sites (Ashdown Forest, Solent, Chichester and Langstone Harbours and Pagham Harbour).

3.21 However, the apparent protection of designated landscapes is compromised by the number and concentration of development sites close to their boundaries. This not only creates impacts on the areas where development is taking place, but also threatens the qualities of the designated landscapes close by.

3.22 New developments and strategic sites in particular, provide the opportunity to use green infrastructure planning to better integrate sites

within the landscapes in which they are situated; to develop landscape settings that are locally distinctive and which recognise and celebrate local heritage. The Network could help to provide the context and rationale for planning these new landscape settings.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

3.23 The Localism Act (2011) gave powers to local communities and parish and town councils to produce Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs). Neighbourhood Planning is a way for local communities to decide the future of their areas. NDPs can indicate where green infrastructure should be provided within individual parishes and also existing areas which need protection and enhancement. NDPs can refer to a wide range of important aspects of green infrastructure provided the evidence is clear from the local community, for example, areas important for views, tranquillity, dark night skies, nature, sports, cycling and walking, access to other routes, local foraging, urban tree mapping, verge management etc.



Photo of the green roof on Kingston Village Hall providing insulation for the building, rain water retention and habitat for wildlife. © V Craddock

OVER-RELIANCE ON DEVELOPMENT TO DELIVER GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

3.24 Over the last few years the limited availability of public funding has severely restricted the development of green infrastructure initiatives and projects. Increasingly the focus has turned towards development as the main method of developing and funding green infrastructure. While development cannot be relied on to provide all the much-needed green infrastructure assets, the preparation of green infrastructure strategies and plans can help by identifying priorities and targeting resources to areas of greatest need.

3.25 In addition, other methods of resourcing need to be explored, including the identification of benefits to other sectors (e.g. health and economic benefits) and green infrastructure as a component of larger, multi-disciplinary projects that might attract larger pots of external funding e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) or funding through the Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs), carbon offsetting and approaches to address nitrate neutrality for example. The strategic approaches to natural capital investment set out in Theme 1 are also looking for innovative ways to achieve investment in nature.

A TWIN TRACK APPROACH FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

3.26 This Network aims to provide the catalyst to improve green infrastructure planning and delivery across the entire Network area. It aims to raise ambition so that benefits are secured for all communities now and into the future, as captured in the Aim and Objectives agreed by the Technical Working Group acting on behalf of the Network partners (see right and page 20).

3.27 The evidence leads to developing a twin-track approach; firstly to develop Strategic Principles that will help raise the status and understanding of green infrastructure across the whole Network area; and secondly by identifying specific targeted investment in areas of particular need.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

3.28 The adoption of Strategic Principles (as set out in the over-arching Aim) addresses this first need and is considered in this section. The second, spatial targeting in specific priority areas is covered in the following section.



The Network Strategic Principles

These encompass the actions which need to be taken across the whole Network area to improve, embed and secure green infrastructure planning and delivery.

Aim of the Network

To create, protect and enhance a connected network of green and blue spaces; which sustainably meet the needs of local communities and supports the Special Qualities of the South Downs National Park; by achieving a consensus about the strategic principles for planning, delivery and management of green infrastructure.

3.29 The principles are derived from a synthesis of:

- The findings and needs emerging from analyses of the evidence themes;
- From the review of partners' policies, strategies and evidence;
- Consideration of how best to deliver the Aim and Objectives, also taking into account the 'headline findings' (previous section).

3.30 The Technical Working Group and Steering Group strongly advocated a cross-sectoral approach to these Principles to break

down traditional professional boundaries and to demonstrate and secure the multiple benefits that are central to green infrastructure.

3.31 More detail on each of the Principles is provided in the next section. During the evaluation of evidence some potential actions emerged these are on page 145 onwards. These do not form a definitive list, but could form the basis of any future Action Plan for the Network Partnership.

THE FIVE STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES IN SUMMARY

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.

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. 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.

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 and natural resources, particularly water. Climate change will create pressures and challenges which will require adaptation. Economic forces will test farming and forestry. The management of these complex challenges requires forward planning into the medium and long term horizons.

5. Better Through Working Together

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