Accessible Greenspace Standard User Guide

Green Infrastructure Framework – Principles and Standards for England

September 2024

Version 1.1 (Beta)

Contents

Acknowledgements

1 Introduction

1.1   The Accessible Greenspace Standard is one of the five [Headline Green Infrastructure Standards](#) within the [Green Infrastructure Framework](#). These standards are voluntary. While the accompanying four standards emphasise the importance of strategic approaches, urban nature recovery, urban greening, and tree cover, the Accessible Greenspace Standard aims to provide clarity regarding the quantity, quality and location of Green Infrastructure (GI) required to meet local needs for outdoor recreation and contact with nature, benefiting physical and mental health and **wellbeing.'.**

1.2   The Accessible Greenspace Standard published in 2023 is a development of the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt, developed by English Nature) published in 1995 (Harrison et al), and an updated version of ANGSt in Nature Nearby published in 2010 (Natural England). ANGSt was used widely by local authorities to compare and benchmark accessible natural greenspace provision at different scales and across local authority areas. The updated Accessible Greenspace Standard includes a broader range of types of greenspaces, while retaining a strong focus on accessible natural greenspaces that provide contact with nature and contribute to Nature Recovery Networks.

1.3   The Accessible Greenspace Standard can be applied in delivering the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF, 2023) policies for green infrastructure, the natural environment and open space. It can be used as part of the process of undertaking assessments of the need for open spaces and opportunities for new provision which are required in the NPPF paragraph 102, 2023). Local planning authorities can also set their own local standards for accessible greenspace, defining requirements for the provision of accessible greenspace through the development process.

1.4   Other standards are also available and can be used alongside the Accessible Greenspace Standard (which includes the [Green Flag criteria](#)), such as [Fields in Trust](#) and the [Country Park Accreditation](#) criteria. The Accessible Greenspace Standard does not cover formal sports provision, for which Sport England is responsible; nor play provision which is covered by Play England (however, play spaces are an important element of accessible greenspace).

1.5   While the Accessible **Greenspace Standard's** main focus is the provision of accessible green infrastructure to meet local needs for outdoor recreation and contact with nature, accessible greenspaces can also contribute to the aims and measurement of the other Headline GI Standards, e.g. an accessible greenspace will include wildlife rich habitat that contribute to the Urban Nature Recovery Standards; contribute to the urban greening of a neighbourhood and therefore to achieving the Urban Greneing factor Standard; and it is also likely to include trees which will contribute to the Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard. The 5 Headline Standards should therefore be applied in combination with each other.

1.6   The Accessible Greenspace Standard should also be used as part of the development of a strategic approach to GI and applied in the context of local policies and strategies, including for example existing open space strategies, and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), e.g. to overlay access and nature recovery to identify synergies, issues, opportunities and gaps in provision. To support this work, the Accessible Greenspace Standard User Guide can be used alongside the Green **Infrastructure Framework's** Guide for developing Green Infrastructure Strategies and Policies (a step-by-step Process Guide for local authorities).

1.7   Finally, the Accessible Greenspace Standard should be used in consultation with partnerships, communities and user groups. (Please see the Partnership and Vision sections of the GI Framework Process Guide for Local Planning Authorities).

1.8   This is an interim and high-level User Guide for the Accessible Greenspace Standard. Natural England will update this with further user guidance once proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework have been confirmed and the GI Mapping Database Version 2.1 has been released.

1.9   **For further information about the GI Framework's Headline Standards please see the** Green Infrastructure Standards for England – Summary. For further information about the benefits of accessible greenspaces please see the Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide section 5.9 page 73.

2 Definitions

2.1   For definitions of Accessible Greenspace, Natural Greenspace and Accessible Natural Greenspace; standards and local standards, please see Appendix 1. There is also an online glossary for the GI Framework on the GI Website.

3 Policy Context

3.1   The Accessible Greenspace Standard contributes to the delivery of many of the policies which seek to deliver benefits for people, nature and the climate, in particular making provision for open spaces, outdoor recreation and enjoyment, contact with nature, social cohesion and climate resilience. Please see Appendix 2 for further information. The GI Framework Process Guide for Local Planning Authorities (2024) Appendix 2 sets out a comprehensive list of the polices that the GI Framework supports.
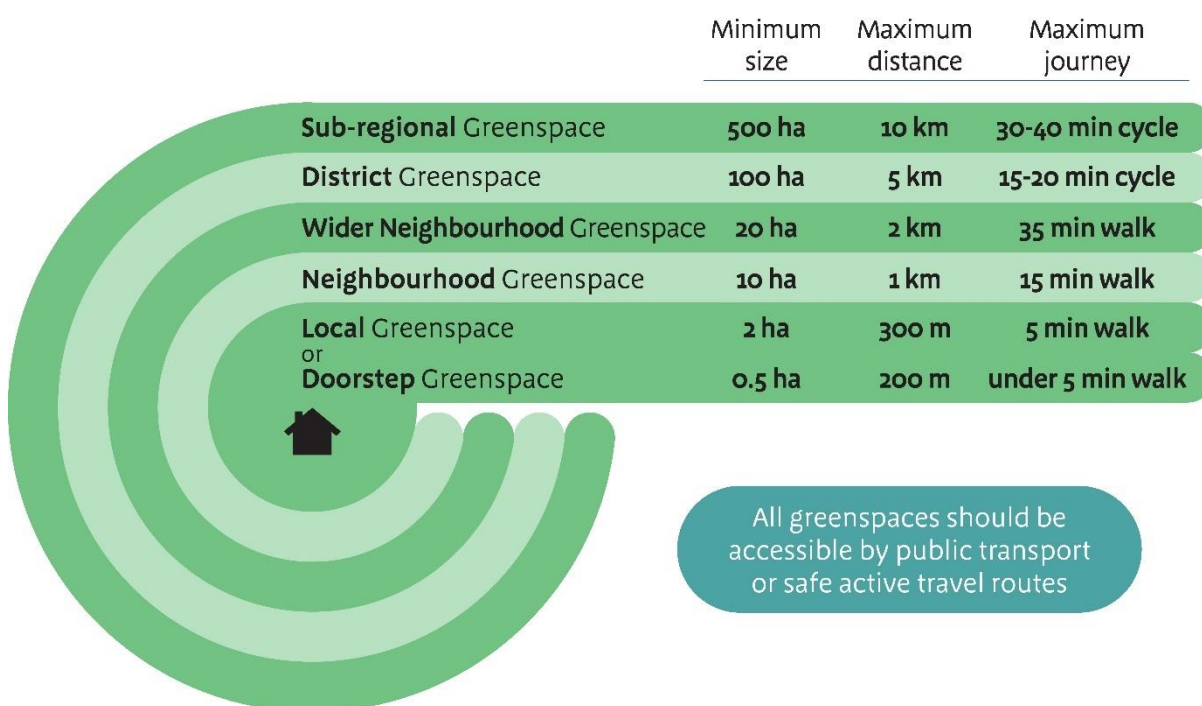
4 The Accessible Greenspace Standard

4.1 As with the other Headline GI Standards, the Accessible Greenspace Standard distinguishes between recommended levels of provision meeting the GI Standards across either, the entire local authority area, or, for major new developments.

4.2 Area wide:

Accessible Greenspace Standards (AGS) – Size and Proximity criteria: Everyone has access to good quality green and blue spaces close to home for health and wellbeing and contact with nature. This should meet the AGS size and proximity criteria, with an **initial focus on access to green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home.** Figure 1 and Table 1 (on page X) provide details of the size and proximity criteria.

Figure 1 Accessible Greenspace Standards – size and proximity

	Minimum size	Maximum distance	Maximum journey
Sub-regional Greenspace	500 ha	10 km	30-40 min cycle
District Greenspace	100 ha	5 km	15-20 min cycle
Wider Neighbourhood Greenspace	20 ha	2 km	35 min walk
Neighbourhood Greenspace	10 ha	1 km	15 min walk
Local Greenspace	2 ha	300 m	5 min walk
or **Doorstep** Greenspace	0.5 ha	200 m	under 5 min walk

All greenspaces should be accessible by public transport or safe active travel routes

Accessible Greenspace Standards – Capacity criteria: Local authorities have at least 3 hectares of publicly accessible greenspace per 1,000 head of population and there is no net loss or reduction in capacity of accessible greenspace per 1,000 head of population at an area-wide scale. Local authorities specify local capacity standards for all major residential development informed by a local accessible greenspace baseline, that takes into account local needs, opportunities and constraints.

Accessible Greenspace Standards – quality criteria: Accessible greenspace meets the Green Flag Award ® Criteria, (Ellicott, 2016) and best practice in accessibility for all: By All Reasonable Means: Least restrictive access to the outdoors (The Sensory Trust, 2020).

4.3   Major Development:

(Major development is defined as residential development with 10 or more homes, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more; or non-residential development with additional floorspace of 1,000 metres squared or more, or a site of 1 hectare or more; or as otherwise provided in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015).

Accessible Greenspace Standards – Size Proximity criteria: For all major residential developments, the local authority specifies the quantity, size and distance criteria (see below) for the provision of accessible greenspace provided within or associated with the development, based on the Accessible Greenspace Standards.

Accessible Greenspace Standards – capacity criteria: All major residential development is designed to meet local capacity standards (hectares of accessible greenspace per 1,000 head of population), specified by the local planning authority.

Accessible Greenspace Standards – quality criteria: (As above for area wide application).

4.0 Further information about the Accessible Greenspace Standards Size and Distance Criteria

4.1   The following types of Accessible Greenspace are in scope of the Accessible Greenspace Standards and are included in the Accessible Greenspace Standard analysis in the GI mapping database. Blue spaces (ponds, lakes, rivers, canals and wetlands) are included where they are within the boundary of Accessible Greenspaces.
- Public Parks and Gardens
- Country Parks
- Doorstep Greens
- Millennium Greens
- Open Access Land (including section 15)
- Local Nature Reserves

- Playing fields (in the Doorstep Greenspace criterion only)

4.2   The Doorstep Greenspace size and distance criterion (and GI mapping analysis for the Accessible Greenspace Standards) includes playing fields to reflect their benefits not only for sport but broader informal use. However, as playing fields are not considered accessible natural greenspace, the Doorstep criterion has been shown as **'not accessible natural greenspace' in the table** 1 below. Playing fields have only been included in the larger size and distance criteria, if they are a part of a larger greenspace that is considered to be accessible natural greenspace e.g. a public park. In these instances, playing fields are considered to be part of the overall accessible natural greenspace provision.

4.3   The Accessible Greenspace Standards are most applicable in urban areas. It is also important to take other types of provision such as Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and village greens into account, especially in rural areas.

4.4   The Table 1 provides further information about the Accessible Greenspace Standard Size and Distance criteria.

Table 1 Accessible Greenspace Standards – size and proximity

Category of Accessible Greenspace	Actual walking distance	Name of criterion	Accessible Natural Greenspace	Size criteria (minimum)	Approximate walking/cycling time
Small greenspace close to home: either a Doorstep or Local Greenspace	200m	Doorstep Greenspace	N	0.5 ha	Less than 5 minutes
Small greenspace close to home: either a Doorstep or Local Greenspace	300m	Local Natural Greenspace	Y	2 ha	5 minutes

Category of Accessible Greenspace	Actual walking distance	Name of criterion	Accessible Natural Greenspace	Size criteria (minimum)	Approximate walking/cycling time
Medium sized greenspace within 1km	1km	Neighbourhood Natural Greenspace	Y	10 ha	15 minutes
Medium large Greenspace within 2km	2km	Wider Neighbourhood Natural Greenspace	Y	20ha	35 minutes
Large greenspace within 5km from home	5km	District Natural Greenspace	Y	100 ha	15 – 20 minutes cycling from home
Very large Greenspace within 10km from home	10km	Sub-regional Natural Greenspace	Y	500 ha	30 - 40 minutes cycling from home

4.5 **Notes regarding the Table 1:**
- Distances given are actual walking distances. (Please see below for methods of measurement in the GI Mapping and the Defra Access to Greenspace in England dataset.
- Table 1 uses a walking speed of 60 metres per minute, which is the average walking speed for teenagers and people of 60 years (Fritz and Lusardi 2009). It uses a cycling speed of 20 kilometres per hour as an average for inexperienced cyclists.
- Where possible all greenspaces should be accessible by public transport and or safe active travel routes.

4.6 The Doorstep and Local Accessible Greenspace criteria are considered to be alternatives for small greenspace close to home. The preferred provisioned Local Accessible Greenspace (i.e. at least 2 ha in size within 300 metres of home), however, the Doorstep Greenspace criterion has been introduced into the Standard in

recognition that in existing and densely built-up areas there may not be sufficient space to create new greenspaces of at least 2 ha in size.

The GI Mapping Database and the Accessible Greenspace Standard

4.7   The England GI Mapping Database uses a straight-line approach to measure distance from the boundary of each greenspace to create a buffer around the perimeter of the greenspace of a width commensurate with the Accessible Greenspace Standard distance criterion that is relevant to the size of the greenspace. Residents of homes that are located within the buffer are considered to live within the Accessible Greenspace Standard size/ distance criterion.   The GI Mapping creates buffers for each of the Accessible Greenspace Standards size and distance criteria.

4.8   You can download the GI Mapping Data from the data.gov.uk website Green and Blue Infrastructure (England). You can also add your own local data to the GI Mapping download. Please see the GI Mapping User Guide and Method Statement for further information.

4.9   The Datasets that are in scope of the Accessible Greenspace Standard mapping and analysis are shown in table 2.

Table 2 Datasets in scope of the Accessible Greenspace Standard mapping and analysis

Number	Mapping source	Type of greenspace	Accessible	In scope of Accessible Greenspace Standard mapping & analysis
1	OS Greenspace	Allotments or Community Growing Spaces	No	No
2	OS Greenspace	Bowling Green	No	No
3	OS Greenspace	Cemetery	Yes	No
4	OS Greenspace	Golf Course	No	No
5	OS Greenspace	Other Sports Facility	No	No
6	OS Greenspace	Play Space	Yes	No

Number	Mapping source	Type of greenspace	Accessible	In scope of Accessible Greenspace Standard mapping & analysis
7	OS Greenspace	Playing Field	Yes	Buffer_200 only
8	OS Greenspace	Public Park or Garden	Yes	Yes
9	OS Greenspace	Religious Grounds	Yes	No
10	OS Greenspace	Tennis Court	No	No
11	Local Nature Reserves	Local Nature Reserve	Yes	Yes
12	National Nature Reserve	National Nature Reserve	No	No
13	Natural England open access data (including section 15)	Natural England open access data (including section 15)	Yes	Yes
14	Millennium Greens	Millennium Greens	Yes	Yes
15	Country Parks	Country Parks	Yes	Yes
16	Doorstep Greens	Doorstep Greens	Yes	Yes

4.10 The GI Mapping Database provides analyses of access provision and deprivation, and population density. You can overlay these analyses with the mapping of other standards e.g. the urban greening factor, and other relevant information such as amount of private garden space, Public Rights of Way and access to coastal areas. This will help to understand and compare levels of provision and need in either specific areas or across a wider area. As mentioned, you can also overlay the mapping layers with data in Local Nature Recovery Strategies to identify synergies, opportunities and potential issues.

Defra's Access to Green Space in England Official Statistic in Development

4.11 **The England wide Defra '**[Access to Green Space in England](#)**'** Official Statistic in development provides a network analysis of greenspace proximity. You can download the full datasets for 7 measures of access to greenspace, i.e. the Access to Greenspace Datafile. Three of these measures are the network analyses for the Doorstep, Local and Neighbourhood Accessible Greenspace Standard criteria.

4.12 This dataset uses a more detailed measurement of access to greenspace using actual walking routes rather than a direct line measurement. It is therefore more accurate in terms of the distance travelled than the GI Mapping Database. However, it is a standalone dataset, and locally held data cannot be added.

5.0 Further information about the Accessible Greenspace Standards Capacity Criteria

5.1 A traditional and commonly used way to set standards for greenspace is to set capacity standards for accessible greenspace. This is advocated by [Fields in Trust](#) (Fields in Trust, 2015) and included in the National Model Design Code (DLUHC 2021a). It has been adopted by many local authorities.

5.2 The Accessible Greenspace Standard uses a Capacity standard of at least 3 ha accessible greenspace per 1,000 Head of Population measured at district /borough/ unitary authority-wide scale. This is to ensure that sufficient quantity of greenspace is provided for the population across a local authority area.

5.3 Local Authorities should set local capacity standards per 1,000 Head of Population for all major residential development. These local capacity standards should be informed by the existing provision of greenspace and a local assessment of needs, opportunities and constraints.

6.0 Further information about the Accessible Greenspace Standards Quality Criteria

6.1 **The Green Flag Award®** scheme originated in 1996 and is a non-profit international accreditation programme that recognises and awards well managed parks and green spaces. This sets a benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor

spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world. (Ellicott, 2016). The Green Flag Award® is managed under licence from the UK Government by Keep Britain Tidy and delivered internationally through a network of national operators. It is an ISO 9001 (QMS) Certified process.

6.2 The criteria include the following which are set out in The Green Flag Award® Guidance Manual (Ellicott, 2016):
- A Welcoming Place
- Healthy, Safe and Secure
- Well Maintained and Clean
- Environmental Management
- Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage
- Community Involvement
- Marketing and Communication
- Management

6.3 The award criteria can be applied to all greenspaces including:
- City Parks
- Nature Reserves
- University Campuses
- Woodland
- Neighbourhood Parks
- Country Parks
- Cemeteries and Burial Grounds
- Botanic and Historic Gardens

6.4 Natural England recommends that parks and greenspaces managers use the Green Flag Award criteria to assess the quality of their site management, and to plan and deliver management enhancements as needed. Local authorities and other organisations responsible for managing greenspaces may wish to apply for accreditation through the Green Flag Award, but this is not necessary to meet the **Green Infrastructure Framework's Accessible Greenspace Standards.**

6.5 Natural England is looking to explore the concept of quality at a GI Network level.

Access for All Criteria

6.6 The Access for All criteria within the Accessible Greenspace Standards are based on **the principle of inclusive access, and best practice guidance set out in '**By All Reasonable Means – Least restrictive access to the outdoors**' (Sensory Trust, 2020).** This publication guides greenspace, recreational route and other recreational land

managers in providing more inclusive access, in more places, for more people, enabling more people of all ages, circumstances and backgrounds to enjoy the outdoors.

6.7   The updated Guide responds to the Equality Act 2010, and addresses accessibility in its widest sense, embracing all the protected characteristics identified by the Equality Act (2010). The Guide is based on the principle of Least Restrictive Access – an approach that aims for the highest standards possible for a particular piece of **work.**'

6.8   [Outdoor Accessibility Guidance](#) was developed by Paths for All together with the Sensory Trust (Paths for All 2023). The guidance aims to help make outdoor places and spaces, routes and facilities more accessible, and outdoor experiences more inclusive, so they can be enjoyed by everyone (Paths for All).

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Definitions

Accessible Greenspace

Accessible Greenspace is defined as greenspace that is specifically provided FOR public access, or one to which the public would usually expect to access, or one over which there is a public RIGHT to open access, and deemed likely to be accessible to the public at any reasonable time, free to entry and available for a range of pastimes (although some sites may be closed to the public overnight and there may be fees for parking a vehicle). Accessible greenspaces are available to all, meaning that every reasonable effort is made to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2020. There are a range of types of greenspaces included within the definition of publicly accessible greenspace. Accessible Greenspace can include blue spaces, i.e. accessible rivers and canals. Accessible Greenspace does not include private land to which access is provided on a permissive basis. Table 2 sets out how the GI Mapping Database User Guide has interpreted Accessible Greenspace in the GI Mapping Database.

Accessible Natural Greenspace

Accessible Natural Greenspace is greenspace that meets both the above definition of accessible greenspace and is also natural greenspace. Accessible natural greenspace is therefore a sub-set of the wider "accessible greenspace".

Natural Greenspace

Natural Greenspaces are places where human control and activities are not intensive so that a feeling of naturalness is allowed to predominate. Natural and semi-natural greenspace exists as a distinct typology but also as discrete areas within the majority of other greenspace typologies.

Table 2 sets out how natural greenspace has been interpreted with respect to accessible greenspace in the GI Mapping.

Open access land

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) normally gives a public right of access to land mapped as 'open country' (mountain, moor, heath and down) or registered common land. These areas are known as 'open access land'. You can find out if the public has a right of access to land under the CROW Act using the online maps.

Much of the [coastal margin](#) that's being created as part of the work to implement the King Charles III England Coast Path is also open access land.

Standard, Local Standard and Benchmark

'A Standard is an agreed, repeatable way of doing something. It's a published document that contains a technical specification or other precise criteria designed to be used consistently as a rule, guideline, or definition'. This definition is based on the [British Standards Institution's](#) definition of standards (British Standards Institution, 2012).

The Green Infrastructure Standards define criteria and attributes for good green infrastructure and how to plan, deliver and maintain it. They include criteria/ attributes relating to quantity, size, proximity, capacity, quality, accessibility, type and process (planning and management of green infrastructure) and are designed to be used consistently as a guideline.

In this context, a local standard is one that is set by the local authority (or other organisations with responsibility for accessible greenspace provision) taking account of local context.

Benchmark is a comparison measure with other locations.

Appendix 2 - Policy Context

The Accessible Greenspace Standard contributes to the delivery of many of the policies which seek to deliver benefits for people, nature and the climate, in particular making provision for open spaces, outdoor recreation and enjoyment, contact with nature, social cohesion and climate resilience.

The core policy drivers that the Accessible Greenspace Standard supports include:

- The Government's [25 Year Environmental Plan](#) – which includes a commitment to draw up a national framework of green infrastructure standards, ensuring that new developments include accessible greenspaces and that any area with little or no greenspace can be improved for the benefit of the community.
- The [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) - includes actions to improve access to nature, including a commitment that everyone should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space. It also recognises that 'good quality green infrastructure is important for health and wellbeing, air quality, nature recovery and for delivering net zero' and commits to 'Monitor and evaluate the impact of the Green Infrastructure Framework'.
- The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (2023)by supporting in the creation of strategic policies for green infrastructure (paragraph 20), promoting healthy and safe communities through the provision of accessible green infrastructure (paragraph 92), creating resilient places for climate change (paragraph 159),

conserving the natural environment and by reducing air pollution in towns and cities (paragraph 186).

- The Green Infrastructure Framework provides a complementary planning tool to achieve the objectives of the National Design Guide. The Accessible Greenspace Standard (and other Headline Standards) provides a mechanism to promote and measure the provision of nature-rich landscapes (Characteristics N1-N3) and public spaces (Characteristics P1-P3).
- The National Model Design Code, which mentions the GI Framework and Accessible Greenspace Standard in the chapter on Nature on page 20. The Natural England Planning and Design guide complements the National Design Guide and provides further information on the delivery of good green infrastructure.
- The Biodiversity Duty set out in the Environment Act. The Accessible Greenspace Standard, with its focus on natural spaces provides a mechanism to enable local authorities to develop and deliver strategies to enhance biodiversity and meet this duty.
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) which sets a minimum requirement for a 10% net gain for biodiversity for new developments. The Accessible Greenspace Standard can work alongside can help to enhance the functionality of the habitat delivered as a requirement of BNG, in place and ways that do not impact negatively on the biodiversity interest. BNG is mandatory under Environment Act 2021.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), which are new locally led, mandatory spatial strategies for nature required by the Environment Act 2021. LNRS are tools designed to drive more coordinated, practical, and focussed action to help nature and establish the Nature Recovery Network (NRN). Green Infrastructure strategies and policies can apply the Accessible Greenspace Standard and inform LNRS and the NRN.

The various commitments to Green Infrastructure in national and local policy can be further referenced alongside international commitments as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the heart of this are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Green Infrastructure Framework and Accessible Greenspace Standard links most closely to the following SDGs:

- Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.
- Goal 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
- Goal 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- Goal 15 Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

The Green Infrastructure Framework and processes to developing a green infrastructure strategy also link to international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity Global Biodiversity Framework, in particular the following targets:

- Target 1 Plan and manage all areas to reduce biodiversity loss.
- Target 2 Restore 30% of all degraded ecosystems.

- Target 3 Conserve 30% of land, waters, and seas.
- Target 8 Minimise the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and build resilience
- **Target 11 Restore, maintain and enhance nature's contribution to people.**
- Target 12 Enhance greenspaces and urban planning for human well-being and biodiversity.
- Target 14 Integrate biodiversity in decision-making at every level.

Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and **England's traditional landscapes are** safeguarded for future generations.

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