Guide for developing Green Infrastructure Strategies and Policies

A step-by-step process guide for local authorities to apply the Green Infrastructure Framework

Version 1.3 (Beta)

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Contents

Foreword

We all need access to nature in our day-to-day lives, whether we live in towns, the countryside, or on the coast. We know it brings huge benefits to our health and wellbeing, but high-quality greenspace also provides environmental security: clean air and water, healthy food and resilience to climate change. By designing places with nature at their heart, we can have healthy communities and thriving wildlife and beautiful places to live and work.

Networks of multi-functional green and blue spaces contribute especially to quality of life in towns and cities. Known as green infrastructure, these nature spaces can offer all the benefits outlined above. Trees, green roofs, and vegetation can reduce extreme heat in urban areas. Sustainable urban drainage features can reduce flood risk following heavy rainfall, which in turn can reduce costs of climate change for residents and businesses. Hedges and trees around schools can improve air quality, helping to protect those spaces from vehicle exhaust emissions.

Parks are perhaps one of the most established forms of green infrastructure in towns and cities and in England are worth £140 per year to each urban resident. Together, this network of parks across the country delivers over £6.6bn of health, climate change and environmental benefits each year including £2.2bn in avoided health costs. And this can often be designed, delivered, and maintained for much less than 'grey' engineered solutions.

Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework helps Local Planning Authorities, developers and communities to work in partnership to both enhance existing green spaces and plan high quality, nature-rich networks within and around residential and other developments. It offers an integrated approach to planning and design; many green infrastructure features count towards Biodiversity Net Gain, and the nature networks created support the growth of the national Nature Recovery Network.

This Process Guide sets out six steps to develop green infrastructure strategies and policies to integrate into local planning for the benefit of people and nature. It can be used alongside the other components of the GI Framework – the Principles, Standards, Planning and Design Guide, GI Mapping Database and case studies available through the GI Framework website. We plan to update this Guide with new and emerging best practice. We welcome feedback and case studies via enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

We hope that this Guide will support you to deliver government housebuilding targets alongside the nature recovery, health and wellbeing improvements, and climate and environmental benefits that society also needs, and that will also contribute to government's nature and climate targets. Housebuilding and nature can and must go hand in hand. This Guide will help you achieve that.

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Chief Executive Officer of Natural England

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Acknowledgements for the GI Standards User Guides are included in each Guide.

Project Manager

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List of abbreviations

BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EA	Environment Agency
EIP	Environmental Improvement Plan
FC	Forestry Commission
GI	Green Infrastructure
IoD	Index of Deprivation
LNRS	Local Nature Recovery Strategies
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LWS	Local Wildlife Site
MSOA	Middle Layer Super Output Area (Census)
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NE	Natural England
NRN	Nature Recovery Network
SuDS	Sustainable Drainage Systems

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Green infrastructure (GI) provides measurable benefits for people's quality of life and nature, including health and wellbeing, access to greenspaces for relaxation and enjoyment, air quality improvement, shade during heatwaves, and flood risk reduction following heavy rainfall. Indeed, it provides a 'life support system' that not only mitigates impacts of development on the natural environment, but also supports wider environmental enhancement and socio-economic gains.

1.2 The housing and economic growth agenda, together with the effects of climate change, means that green infrastructure is increasingly important – but also under great pressure.

1.3 For these reasons, Natural England launched the Green Infrastructure Framework of Principles and Standards for England in 2023, delivering a key commitment of the Government's 25-year Environment Plan (2018). GI also features strongly in the National Planning Policy Framework [1] (MHCLG, 2023), Planning Practice Guidance (MHCLG, 2024). the Environmental Improvement Plan (HM Government, 2023), and the National [Climate] Adaptation Plan. Green infrastructure planning and delivery also supports the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), (Defra, 2023a) which will help to shape delivery of the Nature Recovery Network and the application of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) (Defra, 2023c).

Purpose of the Process Guide

1.4 This Process Guide aims to support local authorities in using the Green Infrastructure Framework to develop green and blue infrastructure strategy and policy, embed these into local plans and deliver targets following a funded delivery plan. The application of the GI Framework and the development of GI strategies are voluntary. This Guide should be read in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance.

[1] The NPPF is currently being consulted upon: National Planning Policy Framework: draft text for consultation (publishing.service.gov.uk)

1.5 This Process Guide should also be used to help embed green infrastructure informed decision making across local authority departments and for sharing with external stakeholders. This can guide wider thinking and planning for green infrastructure outside of the planning system to include Green Infrastructure retrofitting and changes to the management of green infrastructure. The aim is to enable the development of informed and comprehensive green infrastructure related policy and strategy that is based on the Natural England Green Infrastructure Principles, Standards and data, which can be built on to address local needs and respond to local opportunities.

Who the Process Guide is for

1.6 This Green Infrastructure Framework Process Guide is mainly for local authority policy planners and others involved in the preparation and implementation of GI strategies and GI policies. It will also be of interest to a wider audience, including local authority Chief Executives and Elected Members, and other local authority departments given the benefits of GI to public health, parks, biodiversity, landscape, climate resilience, and sustainable transport.

1.7 There are other Process journeys available for developers (Natural England, 2023d) and neighbourhood planning groups (Natural England, 2023e).

How to apply the Process Guide

1.8 The Process Guide updates the first Process guidance for Local Planning Authorities (published 2023) and aims to set out a best practice process in six stages for developing a Green Infrastructure strategy and integrating green infrastructure policies into the Local Plan. It links to the Green Infrastructure Principles and Standards and offers advice on gathering evidence and setting targets based on the headline Standards, that respond to local needs and context. It also includes GI delivery planning, management and maintenance, funding, stewardship, monitoring, and evaluation.

1.9 Natural England will add to this guide to share emerging best practice by stakeholders in adopting and applying the Green Infrastructure Framework.

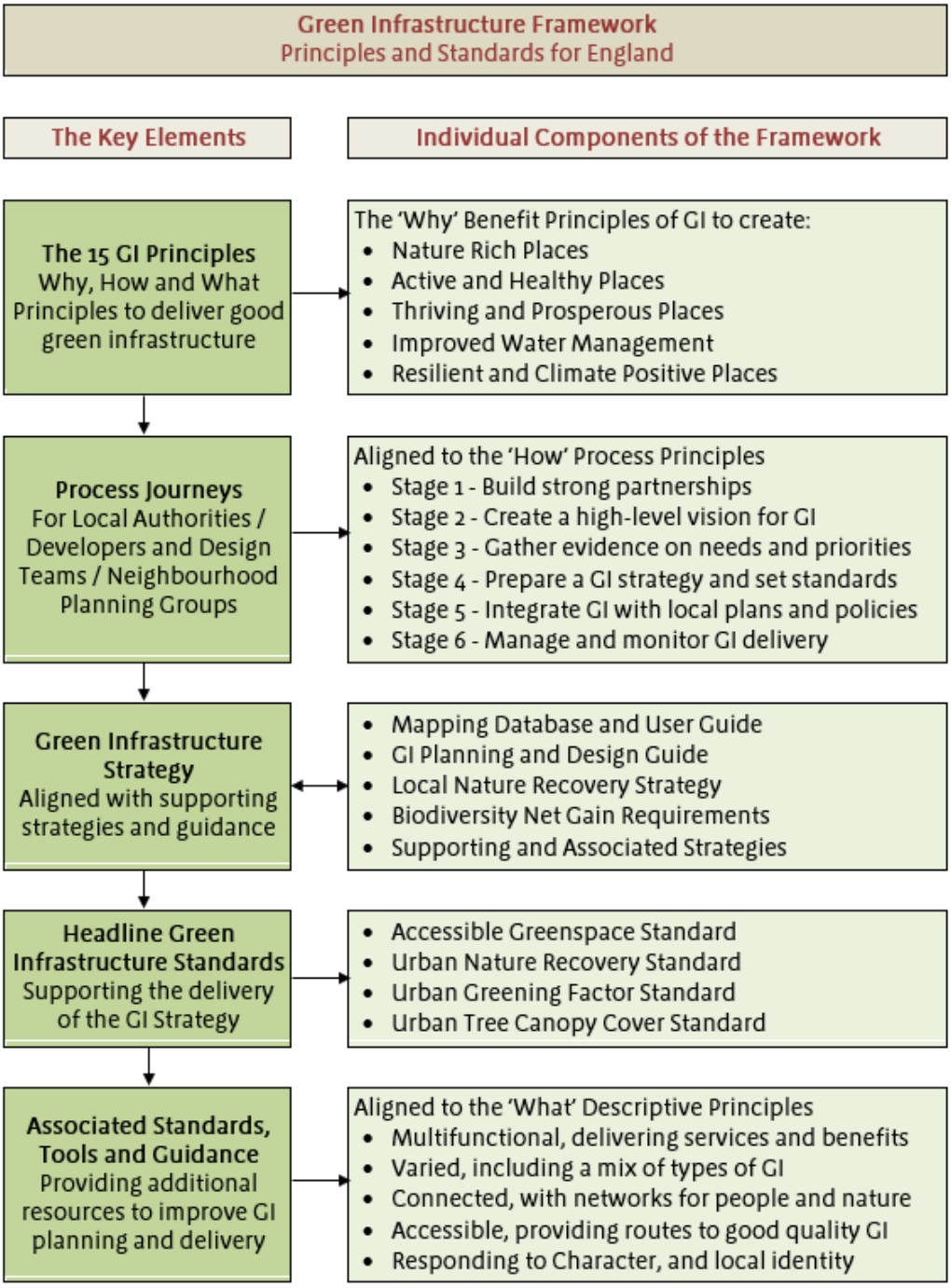
1.10 This Guide is one of a range of publications and tools provided by Natural England, see Supporting Information for details for other guidance available. If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact Natural England at enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

2.0 The Green Infrastructure Framework

2.1 Natural England led the development of the Green Infrastructure Framework working closely with Defra, MHCLG and a cross departmental steering group as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan (HM Government, 2018). The Framework development has also benefited from technical input from an advisory group made up of local authorities, academics, sector institutions, voluntary sector bodies, representative organisations and businesses.

2.2 Figure 1, on the following page, shows the GI Framework components and their relationship to each other. The GI Principles are the golden thread.

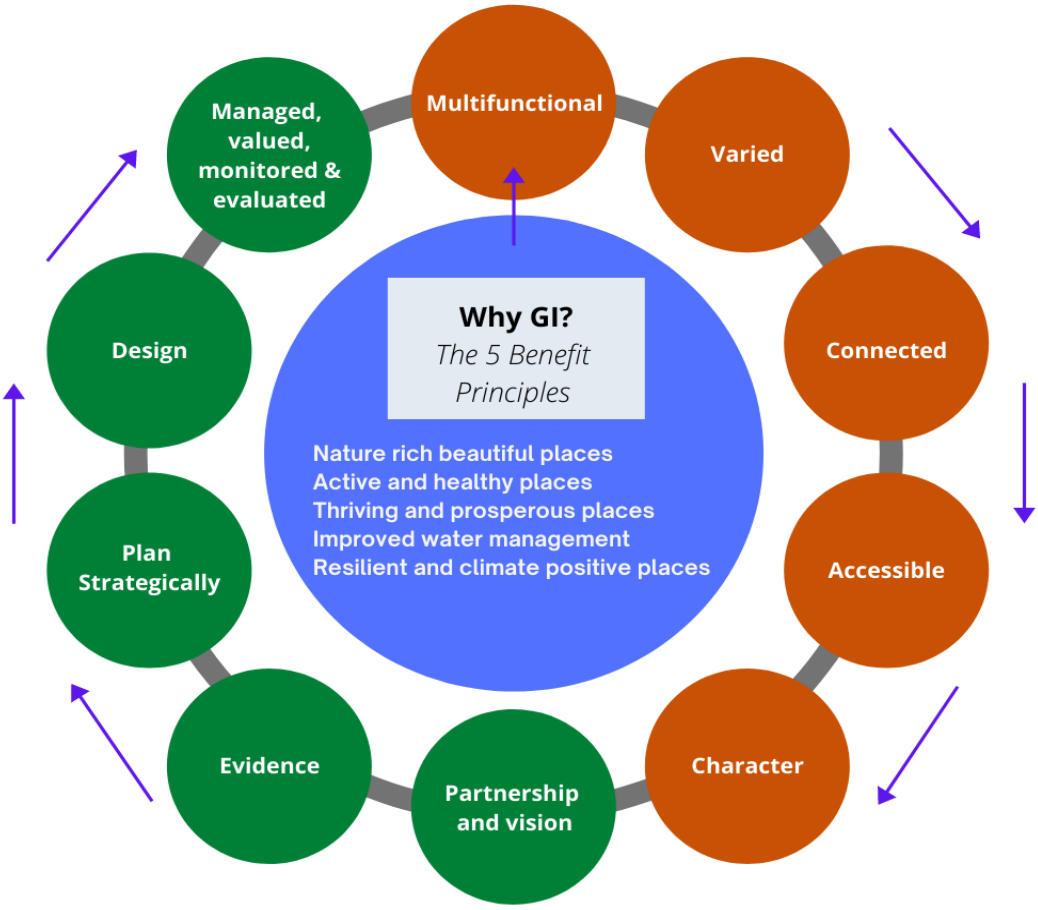
Figure 1 – GI Framework components.



The 15 Principles – Why / What / How

2.3 The 15 Green Infrastructure Principles (Natural England, 2023c) underpin the Green Infrastructure Framework. The principles are intended to provide a baseline to develop stronger green infrastructure policy and delivery. They cover the Why, What and How to do good green infrastructure.

Figure 2 - The Green Infrastructure Principles. The 5 Descriptive Principles are shown in the orange circles and set out 'the attributes of good GI i.e. 'what GI looks like'; and the 5 Process Principles are shown in the green circles, showing 'how to do' good GI.



The Headline Standards

2.4 The Headline Standards (Natural England, 2023b) are a central component of the Green Infrastructure Framework and provide guidance on national standards for green infrastructure quantity and quality.

The five Headline Green Infrastructure Standards are:

S1 Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard
S2 Accessible Greenspace Standard
S3 Urban Nature Recovery Standard
S4 Urban Greening Factor Standard
S5 Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

The five Headline Standards are outlined in Section 4.

2.5 Other Framework components

- Green Infrastructure Maps: mapped environmental, socio-economic datasets to support the standards.
- Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide: practical, evidence-based advice on how to design good quality green infrastructure.
- Green Infrastructure Process Journeys: guides on how to apply all the products in the Green Infrastructure Framework.

Relationship to BNG and LNRS

2.6 The importance of GI is reflected in Government policies and plans, for example, strategic policies for GI in the National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, 2023), and the action to improve access to nature, in the Environmental Improvement Plan (HM Government, 2023). GI can help to deliver the enhanced biodiversity duty set out in the Environment Act (HM Government, 2021), Biodiversity Net Gain (Defra, 2023c) and Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Defra, 2023a) priorities, especially in urban areas.

2.7 The Green Infrastructure framework complements BNG. BNG sets a minimum requirement for new developments to achieve 10% net gain for biodiversity. Using the Green Infrastructure Framework can deliver additional benefits to habitats. BNG is mandatory under the Environment Act 2021 (HM Government, 2021).

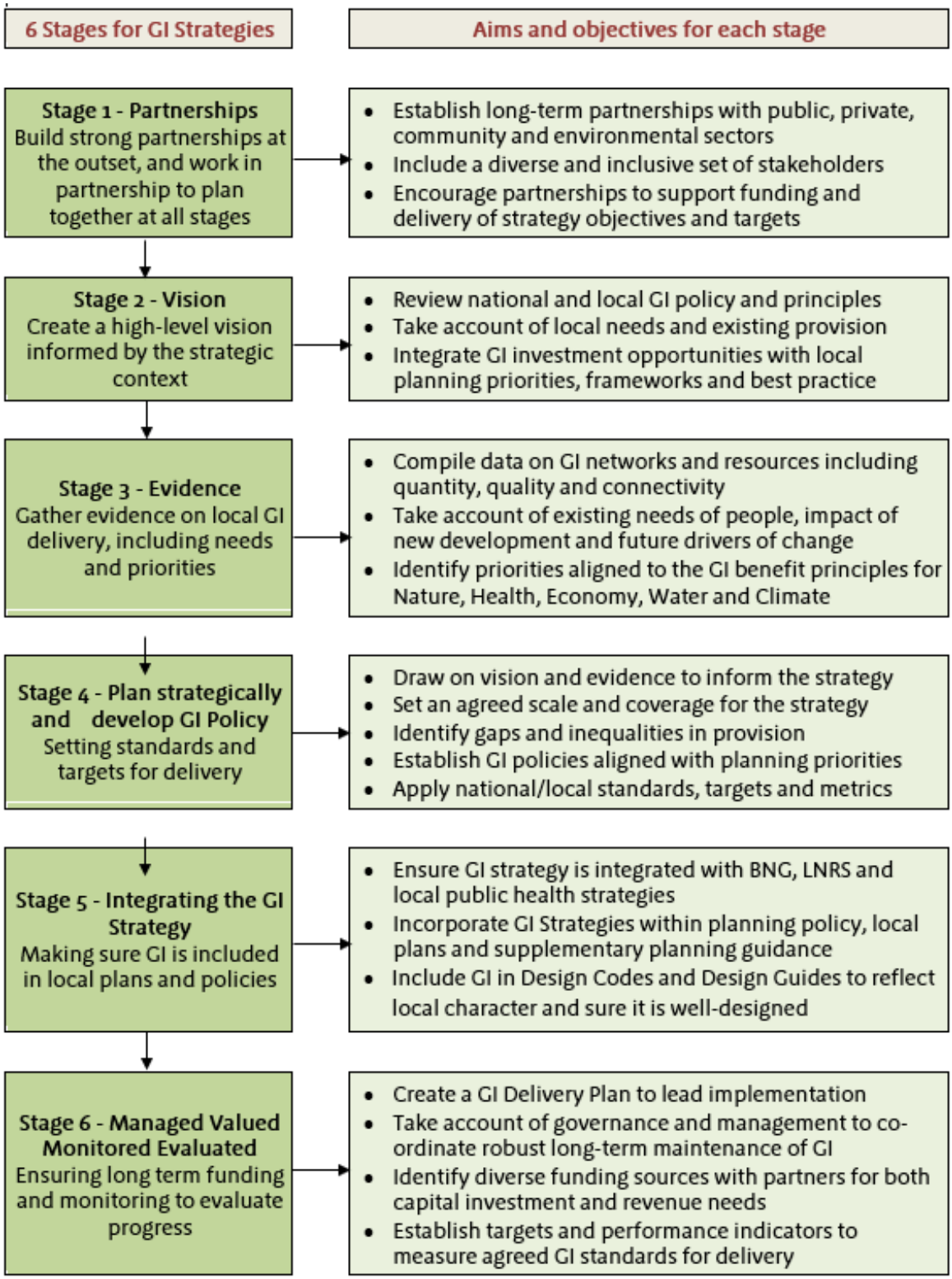
2.8 LNRS (Defra, 2023a) are new locally led, mandatory spatial strategies for nature required by the Environment Act 2021 (HM Government, 2021). LNRS are intended to drive more coordinated, practical and focussed action to help nature. Green Infrastructure strategies and policies can be used to inform LNRS, and vice versa.

2.9 For further information on policy context of the Green Infrastructure Framework, please see Appendix 1.

3.0 Six Stage Green Infrastructure Strategy Process

3.0.1 Using the Green Infrastructure Framework's **How** Principles, a six-stage process has been developed, based on feedback from local authorities, to guide local authorities to create a robust green infrastructure strategy and develop a funded delivery plan. An overview of these stages and the aims and objectives of each stage is set out in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Overview of the six-stage process to use the Green Infrastructure Framework to develop green infrastructure strategies and local policy.



3.0.2 Table 1 shows the relationship between the stages of development of a green infrastructure strategy and local plan processes. Developing an LNRS involves similar stages. All LNRSs are intended to be published by March 2025. Where an

LNRS has been published, LPAs should ensure the GI strategy is informed by the data, priorities, and mapped measures/actions therein; and makes explicit the interlinkages. Further information about LNRS including statutory guidance and regulations can be found on the gov.uk website.

Table 1 – Relationship between the stages of development of a green infrastructure strategy and local plan processes (some of the table is left blank where there is no direct crossover).

Stages to develop a green infrastructure Strategy	Related stages in Local Plan process
Partnership	
Vision informed by strategic context	Regulation 18 consultation
Evidence	Evidence
Plan strategically and develop GI Policy and targets	Viability testing of policies, Regulation 19 - Publish preferred policies
Design	Inclusion in local design codes
Managed, valued, monitored and evaluated	

3.1 Stage 1 – Partnerships

Overview – aims and objectives

- Establish long-term partnerships with public, private, community and environmental sectors
- Include a diverse and inclusive set of stakeholders
- Engage communities and user groups in a robust and inclusive way to enable them to be influential in the creation of the strategy
- Encourage partnerships to support short and long-term funding and delivery of strategy objectives and targets.

Benefits of Partnerships

3.1.1 Working in partnership with communities and stakeholders enables:

a. better quality decisions to be made and more sustainable outcomes to be achieved.
b. a better chance of creating GI that meets people's needs and improves their experience and outcomes, People have the knowledge, skills, experiences and connections that GI planners and providers need to understand in order to support their GI provision.
c. Improved overall quality of GI provision, because GI can be designed and delivered more appropriately, and personalised to meet the needs and preferences of local people.
d. better use of resources, because the GI and related services are more effective
e. Improved business cases and decision-making due to insight from local people which can add practical weight alongside financial and other information to inform the case for change
f. More innovative thinking due to challenge from outside voices leading to new solutions
g. Transparent decision-making, with people and communities involved in governance, which increases accountability to communities.
h. Increased public confidence and support as well as being able to demonstrate public support for proposals
i. Individuals' involvement that can lead to more formal volunteering roles and employment in the GI and environmental sectors.
j. Reduced health inequalities by jointly identifying solutions, developed in partnership with people using community-centred approaches. (NHS England 2023)

3.1.2 Evidence from Natural England's People and Nature Survey (2024) (PaNS) – shows that nature spaces in rural and urban areas are not accessed equally by everyone and that factors including age, ethnicity and socio-economic status seem to play a role. There is a breadth of evidence, ranging from academic research to first-hand experience, that provides insight into the barriers and enablers to accessing and engaging with nature spaces and the outdoors for specific groups. Natural England has brought together this evidence in the Included outside series (2022) way that allows practitioners to consider the needs of different groups that are often under-represented, and to build on previous experiences of how these needs have been tackled. This series also highlights the importance of 'intersectionality': the ways in which social identities and related inequalities – for example, race, class and age – overlap and intersect. Green Infrastructure partnership working, and stakeholder

engagement should ensure an inclusive and diverse approach which can address barriers to access and inequalities in benefits from green infrastructure.

3.1.3 In the case of statutory consultations, for example, a local plan, green infrastructure may form a part of wider engagement activities. It is important to share the full process and motivate partners to implement the resulting policies collectively. Consideration should be given to mapping all stakeholders, as beneficiaries of green infrastructure can sometimes be hidden. There may also be a need to support capacity building to ensure engagement and ultimately support for delivery.

Partnership formation – who to include and Terms of Reference

- Make the most of existing partnerships.
- Carry out stakeholder analysis to identify stakeholder groups, statutory bodies, NGOs, local authority departments, community representatives, developers and landowners, who may not be represented in existing partnerships.
- Establish and agree partnership Terms of Reference early in the process, setting out roles and responsibilities and who and how the partnership will make decisions.
- Ensure that sufficient resources are available to build and maintain the partnership throughout each phase, including post-delivery evaluation and reporting.

3.1.4 Rather than setting up a new partnership to develop a GI Strategy, there may already be existing partnerships with similar purposes and memberships, such as a Local Nature Recovery Partnership, or Climate Action Partnership. Approaching these partnerships to discuss integration and joint working could promote mutual benefits of efficient use of resources and joint funding and enhanced and integrated outcomes

3.1.5 Stakeholders are all those people affected by a GI Strategy and or GI policies, or who have an important influence on the development, delivery and monitoring and evaluation of a GI Strategy. They need to be involved from the very early stages.

3.1.6 Communities of place and user groups are essential members of partnerships. In local authorities and more widely, stakeholders can include public health, active travel/transport, education, housing, climate change, sustainable drainage/water and regeneration related teams. Thinking broadly and innovatively can help identify who can help you develop and deliver your GI strategy in the long-term and spread the responsibility to be a whole urban landscape approach.

3.1.7 Stakeholders can be key delivery partners and will need to be involved in the development/inception stage and seen as valuable and equal partners so should feed into the vision (Stage 2) and strategy (Stage 4).

3.1.8 Stakeholder analysis is an important early step in GI strategy development. It helps to identify and understand stakeholders and how they use and are affected by GI, how they influence GI and its use and benefits, and their role in decision making.

3.1.9 Many stakeholder analyses include a power-interest matrix, which considers each stakeholder in terms of their power and interest in GI and indicates an engagement strategy accordingly.

Figure 4 - Power-Interest Matrix: Options for dealing with stakeholders in policy processes.

Role of national and local stakeholders

3.1.10 National and local bodies can contribute different and complementary skills, knowledge and resources to local partnerships. National level partners are well-placed to support the local partnership in communicating 'vertically' to relevant national partnerships, agencies, and organisations. National agencies can contribute specialist knowledge and evidence and look to respond to emerging evidence needs across the country through their wider research, National bodies can also be advocates for local partnerships, can facilitate information exchange across projects and share their achievements and learning at a wider scale. Also importantly, national bodies will have insight into national funding streams and new funding opportunities.

3.1.11 Local bodies including communities will be important in contributing local knowledge and understanding of GI on all the above areas at a local level, and in particular regarding their experience as GI users and interest groups, their wishes and needs of GI and its role both current and future in their local place/ neighbourhood. As stated above, people have the knowledge, skills, experiences and connections that GI planners and providers need to understand in order to support their GI provision.

User groups and interest groups

3.1.12 In identifying potential partners, it is essential to consider:

- Green infrastructure users including communities of place and communities of interest
- Organisations who own or manage greenspaces
- Organisations that provide services on or use green infrastructure assets – e.g. healthy walking, green gym, or orienteering etc.
- Those with capabilities in monitoring, reporting and evaluating the delivery and outcomes of GI projects and programmes.

3.1.13 When identifying partners, consider the outcomes that your green infrastructure policy can help to deliver. Reference to the 5 Benefits or Why Green Infrastructure Principles can help to identify relevant leaders and how green infrastructure can meet their objectives, see Table 2. All can potentially be investors further down the line. Using the right language can be important to tap into this and strengthen the connections between users and providers.

Table 2 - High level outcomes and which organisations it may be important to work with.

Why Principle	Outcomes	Suggested partners
Why 1: Nature-Rich Beautiful Places	Explore how green infrastructure can achieve a measurable increase in biodiversity through enhancing existing and creating new habitats and connections and how Biodiversity Net Gain contributions can help deliver.	Biodiversity Net Gain leads, local biodiversity or ecology experts, reps from local wildlife and other NGOs and community groups (including Local Nature Partnerships and biological records centres). Statutory bodies such as Forestry Commission

Why Principle	Outcomes	Suggested partners
		Landowners and land managers Landscape architects, planners and managers, urban designers
Why 2: Active and healthy places	Explore how green infrastructure can support activities that are beneficial to health and wellbeing	Directors of Public Health, environmental health practitioners, Integrated Care Boards and Health and Wellbeing Boards, Integrated Care Partnerships. Community Safety Officers and the Police Local community groups, such as tenants and resident's associations, plus single interest groups
Why 3: Thriving and prosperous places	Explore how green infrastructure can facilitate inclusive prosperity and regeneration, helping to create high quality environments which attract businesses and investors	Regeneration leads and Local Enterprise Partnerships Chambers of Commerce Business Improvement Districts Transport / highways stakeholders (Green infrastructure corridors alongside transport infrastructure can be an important part of the green infrastructure network) Major developers active in the locality Schools and education providers Local Councillors, lead members and Members of Parliament Local Industries

Why Principle	Outcomes	Suggested partners
Why 4: Improved water management	Explore how green infrastructure can reduce surface water run-off and improve water quality.	Lead Local Flood Authorities, Water Companies and local resilience forums where relevant Environment Agency
Why 5: Resilient and climate positive places	Explore how to design, deliver and manage green infrastructure to mitigate climate change and increase resilience to climate change. For example, how to reduce the risk of flooding, minimise the urban heat island effect and help wildlife to adapt through design.	Net zero and climate change mitigation and adaptation leads Local representative from communities most at risk from climate change.

3.1.14 It will be critical for stakeholders to understand how green infrastructure is performing and meeting local needs; this might be at different scales e.g. local authority level or masterplan area. This can be achieved through creating working relationships between those organisations and local authority departments managing the green infrastructure and planning officers. This should help with defining common or overarching priorities. A focus on long term stewardship, maintenance and functionality can also be important parts of the discussion.

3.1.15 Consider undertaking a skills audit to ensure the partnership has right skills and knowledge to lead and deliver its vision and outcomes. This may include technical knowledge, but also understanding of social issues or historical change. Develop a training and development plan and or identify external skills to draw on.

Role of Public/ community Engagement

3.1.16 Definitions of public engagement vary depending on the context in which it is being used and the outputs and outcomes being produced. Defra's Public Engagement Review (2022) acknowledges that public engagement definitions range from improving public understanding and knowledge of issues and policies, gaining insights of public values and perspectives, through to engendering trust through more transparent decision-making processes. For the purpose of

developing a GI strategy, public engagement needs to provide opportunities for public dialogue and representation in local policy and decision-making. However, by enabling communities to have a voice in shaping the GI Vision and subsequent GI planning and design partnerships can foster community ownership of the outcome, and active participation in ongoing GI delivery, management and maintenance. Community engagement needs to be undertaken in a robust and inclusive way to enable communities to be influential in the creation of the GI Strategy e.g. Citizen's Assemblies, Citizen Panel.

3.1.17 Practitioners and decision-makers should take time to understand the local context in which engagement is being carried out. This could include collection and analysis of evidence of the social and environmental characteristics of local space, what engagements have previously taken place, or what existing groups or networks currently exist that already engage with local communities or contribute to GI. The following should be considered when planning to engage people on GI:

a. The length and time scale of the engagement process, how often it might be necessary to engage with participants and for what purpose? How to engage stakeholders in dialogue as early as possible in the decision-making process and draw on their expertise and lived experience in shaping the engagement plan.
b. Use communication methods suitable for the stakeholders to ensure broad engagement. Do not assume that participants have technical knowledge of the issues being discussed.
c. Recognise that different tools and approaches for engagement will work differently in different situations. Consider how discussions or issues that are outside of the engagement objectives will be captured and managed.
d. Manage expectations of the engagement process by establishing a shared stakeholder understanding of what can or cannot be included in the process and, therefore, in the vision, strategy and policy.
e. Identify priority issues and common concerns across agencies and stakeholders including what are the relevant hooks and motivations for each.
f. Examine the geographical boundaries to ensure that interests outside of the area which can impact, are fully considered.
g. Understand any historical barriers between the stakeholders that could impact on developing a common vision.
h. Establish and agree power dynamics (i.e. who makes decisions or is empowered to undertake specific tasks) to ensure all stakeholders have a voice.

3.1.18 Further sources of information and Example of partnership and public engagement practices:

- Co-production Project Planner: Co-production Project Planner | Iriss
- Forest Research Public Engagement Tools: Toolsheets - Forest Research
- Involve UK: Involve
- Natural England: Embedding and evidence-led, best-practice culture of engagement

Desired outcomes from this stage:

3.1.19 To ensure:

- An established, well informed, and inclusive green infrastructure partnership, including community and wider stakeholder representation and founded on stakeholder analysis.
- Good connections with associated communities, partnerships and stakeholder groups.
- Partnership Terms of Reference
- Community and stakeholder engagement plans e.g. Citizen's Assemblies, Citizen Panel.

3.2 Stage 2 - Vision informed by strategic context

Overview – aims and objectives

- Review national, regional and local GI policy and principles
- Undertake a high-level review of local evidence of needs that GI can help to address and review of existing provision
- Identify the problems you are trying to fix and how you can frame these as your biggest opportunities
  - understanding of how green the place is,
  - understanding of how existing spaces are managed,
  - understanding of current usage,
  - understanding of current challenges,
  - understanding of the benefits and opportunities
- Take a strategic approach - holistic, informed and evidence-based to achieve multifunctional benefits.
- Integrate GI investment opportunities with local planning priorities, objectives and frameworks
- Create a GI vision for the future – a case for change along a range of prioritised themes for the area.

Review of policies, strategies and key evidence

3.2.1 This review process should seek to identify all GI specific policies and all policies which contribute to GI. To achieve this the following actions are recommended:

- Review relevant national green infrastructure planning policy and guidance, as detailed in Appendix 1, for example, National Planning Policy Framework, Planning Practice Guidance, National Model Design Code, National Design Guide. Check relevant adopted or emerging regional or area wide policies such as combined authority strategies.
- Examine relevant adopted or emerging local authority policies.
- Consider strategies produced by local authorities and other relevant local organisations e.g. LNRS, net zero, transport, health and wellbeing, nature recovery (locally), and how the GI Strategy responds or integrates into these ones.

3.2.2 Review the Natural England Green Infrastructure Principles and Standards for the policies which should be included. For example, for biodiversity, review the local nature recovery strategy. Documents such as river basin management plans, local greenspace strategies, and masterplans, if available, are all relevant. Policies including net zero, air quality targets, flood risk reduction, food production or physical and mental health and sports activity will be important.

3.2.3 Ideally the effectiveness of the current policies in delivering green infrastructure should be reviewed. The Green Infrastructure Mapping Database provides information on green infrastructure assets and analyses, including social and economic data. The mapping database can be downloaded, and local data can be added.

3.2.4 Existing evidence on local needs including information prepared to inform the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans will be relevant. Other assessments such as strategic flood risk assessments (SFRAs), open space assessments, joint strategic needs assessments (public health) and walking and cycling strategies should be used where possible. The SFRA might identify needs and opportunities for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) or river restoration.

3.2.5 Green infrastructure requires an integrated approach and as a result the related policy can be multi-layered and technical. Translating policy into a digestible form can be important and can usefully include identifying the relevant aspects such as policies and duties. Then translating these for different audiences to create common understanding.

Development of Vision

3.2.6 Once relevant policies have been reviewed, you can develop a high-level vision with stakeholders, setting out an aspirational description of the direction of travel and what can be accomplished in the long-term. This vision will help to ensure partnerships are working towards the same common goals over time.

3.2.7 The partnership will need to determine the most appropriate timescale for the Vision and goals, which it may wish to link to other local or national time horizons, e.g. 30x30 or the Net Zero emission target 2050. Partnerships may find it helpful to look at best practice or inspiring stories/case studies from ambitious places across the UK and beyond when coming up with their vision for the future. Partnerships may wish to create the vision using a selection of prioritised themes for the area.

3.2.8 In certain circumstances it can be useful to reverse the process and conduct a high-level vision first before reviewing the policies etc. This can facilitate creative thinking, with a later reality check. This may be more attractive to stakeholders and can gain good results, provided it is explained at the outset to ensure realistic expectations. The vision should reach beyond planning boundaries and offer hooks for multifunctional green infrastructure, to ensure buy in from different local authority departments and stakeholders.

3.2.9 The five Benefits or Why Green Infrastructure Principles can define the breadth of the vision and inform development of high-level outcomes. It may also be helpful to consider at the outset how national Green Infrastructure Standards can be applied locally based on local character, ambition and priorities to support the vision.

3.2.10 Some local authorities have found it useful to measure the outcomes through identification of ecosystem services and/or the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015) (See more in Appendix 1). This has advantages in creating a common objective across departmental and sector boundaries.

3.2.11 Once developed, the Vision can be widely publicised and 'socialised' to gain wider public buy-in and commitment for it.

Desired outcomes from this stage

3.2.12 A clear vision:

- Informed by relevant policies, strategies and a high-level evidence review,
- Co-created by the GI partnership, in a collaborative/ partnership led way, informed by robust and inclusive public/community engagement

- Identifying the problems you are trying to fix and framing these as opportunities
- Integrating GI investment opportunities with local planning priorities, objectives and frameworks.

3.3 Stage 3 - Evidence

Overview – aims and objectives

- Compile information on existing GI assets and resources including quantity, quality and connectivity
- Take account of existing and future needs of people, impact of new development and future drivers of change
- Consider ecological and habitat requirements to support Biodiversity Net Gain and nature recovery
- Analysis of whether current GI assets are meeting best practice from GI standards, meeting current and future needs and meeting the vision for the future. Where are the gaps?
- Identify priorities aligned to the GI Benefit Principles for Nature, Health, Economy, Water and Climate

3.3.1 Stage 3 begins with gathering and assessing evidence. It follows the steps set out in Table 3 to analyse evidence collected and work towards identifying specific GI interventions.

3.3.2 Please note that many of the processes and information contained in this section may have already been undertaken as part of the local plan process, however the following sections assume it has not.

Table 3 – Steps to gain and analyse evidence for GI strategies

Step	Steps to gain and analyse GI evidence
A	Gather evidence – GI asset mapping data, socioeconomic data & surveys etc
B	Map the benefits provided by the existing GI sites, corridors and networks
C	Collate the needs of people and nature

Step	Steps to gain and analyse GI evidence
D	Evaluate whether the current needs are being met by existing GI
E	Estimate future and supressed demand
F	Gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the GI network, its sites, connectivity and functions, as a whole
G	Identify place-based interventions

Step A - Gathering evidence

3.3.3 In terms of the practicalities of data collection and processing it can be useful to consider the following steps:

- Start by reviewing existing national datasets (see Table 4) and local datasets. Identify the essential information, this may have become apparent during initial stakeholder discussions and evidence analysis. Essential information can include data on existing GI assets, benefits delivered and gaps in GI /unmet needs that new or enhanced GI could help to address.
- Review this information against measures and indicators for the green infrastructure Principles and Standards to highlight gaps in evidence.
- Undertake targeted and prioritised evidence gathering to fill gaps. Consider the capacity available to analyse it to avoid effort gathering data that is unlikely to be used.
- Secure a budget and decide a timescale. There will be a range of collection methods, the most suitable will depend on available budget and timescales, both for obtaining, analysing, and maintaining the evidence.
- Collate the data centrally so it can be securely used by decision makers and those who need to be kept informed.
- Decide how often data should be collected and reviewed. Build necessary resources for this into long-term budgets.

3.3.4 Evidence should enable an understanding of the quantity, quality and connectivity of green and blue infrastructure, to assess local green infrastructure provision against the green infrastructure Principles and Standards, including:

- Parks and Gardens – urban parks, country and regional parks, formal gardens.
- Amenity Greenspace – informal recreation spaces, housing greenspaces, domestic gardens, village greens, urban commons, other incidental space.
- Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces - woodland and scrub, grassland, heath or moor, wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and disturbed ground.
- Green and blue corridors – rivers and canals including their banks, road and rail corridors, green bridges, cycling routes, pedestrian paths, and rights of way.
- Vegetated sustainable drainage systems, including green roofs, rain gardens and biofiltration strips, swales, ponds, detention basins.
- Features for species such as hedgehog highways, corridors used by bats and migratory routes for birds.
- Other greenspaces - allotments, community gardens and orchards, private gardens, city farms, cemeteries and churchyards.
- Street trees and other trees outside of woodland

3.3.5 GI evidence needs to include an understanding of the socio-economic context including factors such as population density, deprivation (Indices of Deprivation, MHCLG, 2019), and key health indicators. Local sources of health needs data include Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and health and wellbeing strategies. Data on social and economic challenges and needs in the area should be gathered so that green infrastructure can be planned to address the key challenges. Table 4 sets out a selection of key national datasets and sources for developing a GI Strategy and policies.

3.3.6 Please see Appendix 2 for a more comprehensive data 'Wish List' of evidence to develop a green infrastructure strategy.

Table 4 – Key national datasets for developing GI strategy and policies

Name of dataset/ tool	Owner	Description/Further information
Green Infrastructure Mapping Database	Natural England	Over 100 datasets for all green and blue infrastructure, including designated sites, biophysical and socio-economic information. All data sets are Open and can be freely downloaded.

Name of dataset/ tool	Owner	Description/Further information
		The multiple data layers include e.g. GI assets (accessible and non-accessible), greenness grid, Accessible Greenspace and other GI Standards, e.g. Urban Greening, flood risk, population density, ethnicity data and Index of Deprivation, etc.
Local Nature Recovery Strategy Data viewer	Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	National scale open data provided by Defra to assist in the preparation of LNRS. It includes key data from NE, EA, FC and can be downloaded. Data layers include e.g. NE's National Habitat Network mapping - shows restoration and enhancement zones, Living England Mapping – National Habitat Probability.
Corine/CEH – Landcover	Copernicus UKCEH	Satellite derived landcover data. CORINE Land Cover (CLC) product offers 44 thematic classes, ranging from broad forested areas to individual sites. The product is updated with new status and change layers every six years—with the most recent update made in 2018.
UK Ward Canopy Cover	Forestry Commission	Ward level data on Tree Canopy. Forest Research assessed the percentage tree canopy cover in every ward in the UK. Forest Research delivered the project with partners Brillianto, Trees for Cities, and Woodland Trust.
Tree Equity Score UK	American Forests	Tree Equity Score UK is a map-based application that was created to help address disparities in urban tree distribution by

Name of dataset/ tool	Owner	Description/Further information
		identifying the areas in greatest need of people-focused investment in trees. Co-developed by American Forests, the Woodland Trust and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare.
Defra – UK Air Information Resource	Defra	Open-source data and research on air quality. Alternatively, locally held data on Air Quality Monitoring Areas
Access to Greenspace in England Official Statistic in Development	Defra	Distance to green space for every household in England was measured along a network of walkable streets and paths. Walking distances were calculated with different types of green space included. The percentage of people living within different distance thresholds between households and green space were calculated e.g. 200 metres, 300 metres and1 km. The results are summarised by census geography Middle layer Super Output Area (MSOA).
Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool (ORVal)	Defra	A freely accessible map-based tool that predicts the number of visits to existing and new parks, paths and beaches in England. It estimates the welfare value of those visits in monetary terms and how those visits and values change if the site is altered. Welfare values can be viewed at individual site level or aggregated by regions. Developed by the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute (LEEP) at the University of Exeter, with funding and direction from Defra.

Name of dataset/ tool	Owner	Description/Further information
National Character Area profiles	Natural England	Website contains interactive profiles which describe each of England's 159 National Character Areas (NCAs). Each NCA represents an area of distinct and recognisable character at the national scale.
Enabling a Natural Capital Approach	Defra	These datasets form part of Defra's Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA) resource. Open data, free to access. The Services and Assets Databooks enable data to be identified from 400 UK data sources, tools and studies. See in particular the Urban Natural Capital content.
The People and Nature Surveys for England	Natural England and Defra	The People and Nature Surveys for England gather evidence and trend data about people's access, understanding and enjoyment of nature, and how it contributes to wellbeing The former survey, the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) is also likely to be useful.
SHAPE	Department of Health & Social Care	SHAPE is an online, interactive, data mapping, analysis and insight tool that supports strategic service planning and estates strategy development.

3.3.7 The GI Mapping Database and other 'open' geospatial information can be shared easily with partners and stakeholders. The data underpinning the GI Mapping Database maps can be downloaded, enabling additional local data to be added, enhancing the local understanding and highlight locally relevant issues.

3.3.8 Other local relevant national and local information should be considered. Quantitative data can be complemented with qualitative surveys and other public engagement methods e.g. citizen's panel, and /or a Youth panel, and engagement

with schools and colleges etc. National and local GIS analysis should be considered in the context of community engagement, strategies and surveys etc.

Step B - Map the benefits provided by the existing GI sites, corridors and networks

3.3.9 The benefits of green infrastructure should be identified through examination of the green infrastructure sites, corridors and networks and how they perform against the Natural England Green Infrastructure Principles and Standards as explained below.

3.3.10 Natural England's Green Infrastructure Mapping Database shows the distribution of different types of green and blue infrastructure, including those areas that are accessible and an assessment against the Accessible Greenspace Standards. The maps include socio economic data such as the Index of Deprivation. This means it is possible to look at areas where associated factors coincide, such as those locations that have:

- low levels of greenspace and high levels of deprivation
- low levels of greenspace and high population density
- low levels of greenspace and low extent of private gardens
- low levels of greenspace and a high percentage of man-made surface i.e. low levels of urban 'green cover' (vegetation, soil and water)

Such analysis can help with targeting green infrastructure investment.

3.3.11 For the purposes of a green infrastructure strategy, it is not necessary to identify, in detail, all the benefits provided, more if a benefit exists and to what extent. The benefits information should be collated through a combination of:

- mapped data to help understand the inter-relationship between sites and show corridors and networks.
- tables listing the green infrastructure benefits provided for each site.

3.3.12 Evidence about the local GI network can also be assessed against the 5 Descriptive (What) GI Principles, and this can help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the existing GI in terms of the attributes of good GI. Further information about associated standards, indicators, tools, guidance and checklists will be provided in due course.

3.3.13 Because the Headline GI Standards help to define the type, quantity, quality and function of GI needed to deliver different benefits, they can also be used to develop

an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of benefits provided by local green infrastructure network.

3.3.14 The Headline GI Standards, outlined in Section 4, can be used as a broad proxy for the amount and quality of good quality GI provision that is likely to meet the needs of the local community and deliver the 5 Benefits principles. They can be used with associated standards, tools and guidance such as the County Parks Accreditation criteria (Natural England and Defra, 2022), Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool (Natural England, 2021) and SuDS Guidance to develop a deeper and more accurate understanding of the benefits provided in the local context.

Step C - Collate the needs of people and nature

Human needs

3.3.15 Demand can be seen in terms of the need for the benefits of GI set out in the 5 Benefits Principles: i.e. the need for GI to create places that are nature rich and beautiful, active and healthy; thriving and prosperous; with improved water management; and resilient to climate change.

3.3.16 Demand will be influenced by a number of factors. At a green infrastructure strategy level these may include:

- Population - density, age profile, health – physical and mental, ethnicity, index of multiple deprivation.
- Land use change – new homes and employment uses
- Specific risks such as whether in a flood risk area or air or water quality management areas; area with climate related urban heating issues, high levels of noise etc.

3.3.17 At a site level demand factors may also include:

- Access barriers to sites – roads, railways, main water courses
- The size, quality and facilities available in existing green infrastructure assets and their location
- Community safety, crime and anti-social behaviour

3.3.18 Local partners and stakeholders can help identify relevant evidence on needs for GI. Demand should be assessed in discussion with other related sectors – e.g. Public Health, Sustainable Drainage, active trave/ transport teams, climate change teams, education and regeneration leads. These conversations should explore how GI can deliver broader place-based social and environmental benefits.

3.3.19 Asking local communities what they need and want is important to enable them to highlight what they value, priority issues and the types of green infrastructure that would make a positive difference to their lives. Working from what is important to communities and other stakeholders and then providing the necessary hooks in green infrastructure policy will be essential. Please see Stage 1 Partnerships section on Public/ community engagement.

Wildlife needs and nature recovery

3.3.20 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the area will provide an understanding of wildlife needs and priorities for nature recovery, including pressures on existing sites for nature such as protected sites; fragmentation of habitats, recreational disturbance; and opportunity areas for nature recovery including increased connectivity.

3.3.21 A GI Strategy will often be developed at a district/ or borough scale and will therefore need to apply the (normally) county level LNRS to the smaller local authority area. Government will provide guidance on how local authorities should take account of LNRS.

3.3.22 This step and subsequent steps in the evidence analysis process can be supported by the Local Authority Nature Recovery Toolkit (Planning Advisory Service, 2024), which aims to help local authorities take full advantage of the opportunities for turning its statutory 'must do's' into opportunities for the whole council to deliver on its strategic and corporate ambitions on health, air quality, climate change, adaptation etc.

Step D - Evaluate whether the current needs are being met by existing GI provision

3.3.23 This step focuses on analysis of whether current GI assets are meeting best practice from GI standards, meeting current and future needs and meeting the vision for the future. This enables gap to be identified.

3.3.24 The demands and needs expressed by specific sectors, stakeholders and communities can be plotted against the available supply of green infrastructure. This is best taken forward on a topic by-topic basis initially. For instance, the availability of children's play space, the location of populations and play space can be examined using the Natural England Green Infrastructure Maps and supplemented by local data. The maps can highlight spatial relationships to user groups. The locations of parks with play spaces can be shown with distances overlaid onto the surrounding area to show the catchments. These straight-line

distances can be improved with local network data on access such as the location of entrances and actual walking routes.

3.3.25 Specific tools are available for some aspects of strategic green infrastructure demand and supply such as the Local Nature Reserve Target of 1 hectare of LNR per 1,000 population measured at the district authority scale (see section 4 and the Urban Nature Recovery Standard User Guide, Natural England 2024)

3.3.26 Viewing the different socio-economic and GI Standards layers of Natural England's Green Infrastructure Mapping Database can help to show where current needs are likely to be being met by current provision and where there are gaps (please refer to step b).

Step E - Estimate future and supressed demand

3.3.27 Estimating the future demand for GI should take account of the needs of people and nature, and of the needs of both existing and new communities.

3.3.28 Development can drive environmental led regeneration and contribute positively to nature recovery. New developments that are designed with good quality green infrastructure from the outset – for example with extensive mosaics of new wetlands, grasslands, native shrublands and woods, connected to new housing with footpaths and cycle ways – would create good places to live. Such developments not only benefit people but contribute to the legal Environment Act targets.

3.3.29 BNG and the LNRS will together inform the provision needed for nature recovery. The GI Framework provides guidance on how to design and deliver benefits for both nature recovery and for people in places and in ways in which the dual (or multiple) functions are compatible and work well together.

3.3.30 The GI Framework's Principles and Standards can be used to help identify and plan how to meet these demands in terms of access and recreation, and therefore avoid suppressed demand (which is a desire to consume a product or service but due to barriers this desire is not met).

3.3.31 The GI Framework should be embedded in local plan policies and design codes, setting local standards, targets and requirements. Where GI policies are to be included in a local plan, the associated sustainability appraisal will test policies and proposals against environmental, social, and economic objectives.

3.3.32 Overall understanding the pressures and drivers of change over the timescale of the GI Strategy and Local Plan, as well as for the longer term is critical.

Step F - Gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the GI network as a whole

3.3.33 GI Network and urban landscape analysis can be challenging. Looking at the extent to which linear features such as transport corridors and water courses connect GI assets together, can help highlight connectivity. For instance, how many greenspaces, woodlands, nature areas etc are linked within a river corridor and where are the gaps? How easy it is to travel between them sustainably? How can network connectivity be created or strengthened by adding in additional green infrastructure sites or access routes? Identifying the green infrastructure assets in a particular corridor and their uses, such as for active travel, can help illustrate what assets are missing and how these could be enhanced to support better use. Barriers to use can also be taken into account. These might be physical barriers such as railway lines and motorways or psychological barriers such as anti-social behaviour hotspots deterring users. Long term pressures such as climate change may be a strong driver and be a key focus for justification for green infrastructure assessment and investment.

3.3.34 For some green infrastructure services such as flood risk mitigation, air quality and heat reduction, how the green infrastructure interacts will be more important than physical connectivity. So, flood risk reduction may be improved across a catchment but the individual woodlands which reduce the water flow will not be next to one another. Specialist advice may be needed to understand these relationships. The emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Nature Recovery Network should help with defining wildlife networks and gaps in them and their potential co-benefits, for example, for carbon sequestration. Natural England, Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency will often be the go-to organisations for advice.

3.3.35 Evidence on local needs can generate discussion about the overarching priorities for an area. Prioritisation can be based on considering how to maximise multiple benefits together (biodiversity, health, prosperity, water management and climate change) and in what quantity and quality. Defining the integrated actions to deliver a range of benefits can be developed using a matrix approach. This can list the benefits provided in each location, including new the opportunities, overlaps of benefits on the ground, synergies and conflicts between benefits. These should be openly discussed by stakeholders to facilitate collaborative decision-making. The matrix can also begin to show where compromise between areas of conflict can be resolved. This may in turn help to refine the vision created in stage 2 with more information on what could be delivered, how and where.

Step G - Place based interventions

3.3.36 Strategic scale place-based interventions can be identified through mapping GI deficiencies/weaknesses and identifying opportunities to address them. A key function of green infrastructure strategies is to identify areas for protection and enhancement of GI or reinforce their strategic importance if already identified. Opportunities may be identified by the local community or interest group or could be identified considering key criteria for live funding schemes.

3.3.37 A key function of a Green Infrastructure Strategy is to identify areas for protection and enhancement of GI or, if already identified, reinforce their strategic importance.

3.3.38 Opportunities may be identified by a local community or interest group or could be identified considering key criteria for live funding schemes.

3.3.39 Opportunities for regeneration and new or enhanced GI may also arise through growth and development agendas. By adopting appropriate and achievable GI policies, local plan policies and GI Standards/ targets, of provision, a place can embed good quality of GI provision in development. The Urban Greening Factor for example can ensure that GI is integrated in new housing and commercial developments, creating a prosperous, attractive and thriving place to live and work.

3.3.40 Strategic scale place-based interventions can be identified through mapping GI deficiencies/weaknesses and identifying opportunities to address them. It is important to use a broad range of quantitative and qualitative evidence as outlined in Stage 3, including spatial mapping of existing GI and socio-economic data, to inform where interventions are most needed. This can help influence your strategic goals and proposed projects.

3.3.41 Use your analysis of existing GI against current and future needs, challenges, and opportunities to consider what the overall urban landscape approach will be. For example, doorstep to countryside/coast and what specific interventions may be relevant along that spectrum.

3.3.42 Leading on from the vision, it can be useful to set several strategic goals that reflect the priorities for the place. Include an explanation of where the goal has come from, what the key needs or challenges are to be addressed, what the main opportunities are and then begin to consider potential interventions or projects. For example, a strategic goal around healthy living and wellbeing could be set as a result of public engagement and poor health outcomes in a certain area, the key needs and challenges could be a lack of accessible public green space, activities or opportunities for active travel and the main opportunities could be around

increasing access to nature for children and older people, enhancing the quality and connectivity of green and blue spaces and promoting the use of active travel routes. See Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole's Green Infrastructure Strategy (2022-2031), set out in Appendix 4, as a useful case study.

3.3.43 Further guidance on creating a GI Delivery Plan for implementing the GI Strategy is available in Stage 6.

Desired outcomes from this stage

3.3.44 To ensure:

- Evidence collation and analysis has informed identification of strategic and site-specific GI interventions.
- Strategic Goals are set which outline the overall challenges and opportunities.

3.4 Stage 4 – Plan Strategically and develop green infrastructure policy and targets

Overview – aims and objectives

- Draw on the vision and evidence to inform the strategy
- Set an agreed scale and coverage for the strategy
- Identify gaps in provision and inequalities of distribution
- Establish GI policies aligned with local planning priorities
- Apply national and/or local standards, targets and metrics
- Identify sources of funding and resources for delivery

Preparing a Green Infrastructure Strategy

3.4.1 Local authorities, working in partnership with stakeholders, user groups and local communities, should assess and strategically plan their green infrastructure provision that will form the core objectives of the GI strategy. Plans should set out how green infrastructure will help to create greener, healthier and more prosperous neighbourhoods, with a thriving nature network that can reduce air and water pollution, support sustainable drainage and help places adapt to climate change.

3.4.2 The priorities for investment and future management should first take account of prevailing national and local planning policy and where appropriate, strategic regional and subregional planning objectives. The local authority and GI Strategy

leads should take account of Planning Policy Guidance alongside the National Planning Policy Framework.

3.4.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, MHCLG, 2023) Paragraph 20 states:

'Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places (to ensure outcomes support beauty and placemaking), and make sufficient provision for: d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.'

3.4.4 NPPF Paragraph 181 states:

'Plans should: take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.

3.4.5 The preparation of a GI Strategy should be informed by an analysis of the evidence base collected in Stage 3. This is commonly referred to as a needs assessment that defines particular spatial requirements and functions for GI which, for example may include flood risk management, active travel, play and sports provision.

3.4.6 The strategy should seek to protect and increase GI as a key asset across all scales. In addition to establishing clear environmental policies, GI should be integrated within associated social, health and economic policies. Where loss of GI assets is unavoidable policies should ensure that mitigation and compensation for the loss of GI is designed to meet particular needs.

3.4.7 The strategy should also seek to understand the cultural and social aspects of an area by involving local people in identifying what they value about an area, what is of low quality and performing badly and what they would like to change in the short and long-term.

3.4.8 A GI strategy can identify strategic delivery sites that provide opportunities to meet identified needs associated with new development and enhancing, for example, environmental connectivity and sustainable transport. Strategic long-term thinking to connect existing green infrastructure assets either through enhancements of existing sites, or creation of new green infrastructure assets should be undertaken.

3.4.9 GI strategies should contribute to the delivery of the Nature Recovery Network, priorities identified in Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Net Gain. Strategic sites for BNG can also form part of strategic habitat planning where

multifunctional GI may include strategic areas for habitat banks, providing off-site biodiversity units to the market.

3.4.10 The Environmental Benefits from Nature tool (Natural England, 2021) is a voluntary tool designed to work alongside Biodiversity Metric (Defra, 2023b). It uses a habitat-based approach to provide a common and consistent means of considering the direct impact of land use change across 18 ecosystem service services. Both can provide site-based information that can inform the planning of green infrastructure interventions as part of biodiversity net gain.

Aligning the GI Strategy with the GI Framework

3.4.11 Local GI strategies should use the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework as a starting point, reflect national policy, and aim to give consistency and clarity on the quantity, quality and connectivity of GI that is needed in an area.

3.4.12 The initial development of the GI strategy should take account of the 15 GI Principles and the Headline GI Standards. The What and Why Principles are particularly important as these describe and summarise the benefits of good GI provision. Promoting multifunctionality and improving connectivity are often key ways to increase the delivery of ecosystem services, promoting active travel and health and wellbeing, fostering sustainable economic growth and regeneration, and improving resilience to the impacts of climate change.

3.4.13 The GI Principles that cover character and design emphasise how the role of green infrastructure should respond to local landscape and townscape character using GI to help change it where that will bring benefits, or to conserve, enhance or restore it, where keeping the character is desirable.

3.4.14 Developing the GI strategy should also draw on the wider components of the GI Framework including the GI Mapping resource that will support the spatial analysis of existing GI components and elements. The mapping will help identify gaps in provision and the location of strategic GI development sites. The GI Planning and Design Guide (Natural England, 2023a) will also provide an important point of refence for defining the main components, or typologies of GI, such as public parks and sports grounds, and the specific elements of GI including drainage systems, green walls and green roofs.

3.4.15 Appendix 3 provides a Policy Review checklist. The checklist is intended to be a simple tool for Local Planning Authorities to use to self-assess their draft Local Plan GI policies and identify any gaps/further work required.

GI Typology

3.4.16 It is important to consider typology to ensure the strategy considers the provision of different types of GI to serve particular needs. A detailed list of Typologies is included in Stage 3 Gathering Evidence (See para 3.3.4) which in summary includes:

- Public parks and gardens
- Amenity greenspace
- Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces including wetlands
- Green and blue corridors
- Allotments, orchards, city farms and community gardens
- Cemeteries and churchyards
- Sustainable Drainage systems, including green roofs and walls

Incorporating Green Infrastructure in Local Planning Policy

3.4.17 In developing planning policies, it is important to take account of both national (NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance) and local planning priorities to ensure GI policies can meet strategic and site-specific objectives. The GI Principles, and particularly the Why benefit principles and What descriptive principles provide a useful checklist for drafting GI policies. These will form a key element of the GI strategy and can be incorporated or adapted for inclusion in the Local Plan and supplementary planning guidance.

3.4.18 For example, planning policies addressing the Why benefit principles may include:

- **Nature-Rich**: Promoting ecologically diverse and species rich habitats to achieve BNG and contributing to the development of wildlife corridors and LNRNs.
- **Active and Healthy**: Supporting the planning and delivery of sustainable transport systems and in particular active travel networks for walking and cycling.
- **Economically Prosperous**: Identifying key commercial areas to increase GI provision, improve character and enhance visual amenity which can boost investor confidence.
- **Improved Water Management**: Alleviating the risk of flooding by increasing the provision of sustainable drainage systems for attenuation and improving water quality.
- **Resilient and Climate Positive**: Considering the long-term impact of climate change including moderating peak summer temperatures and accommodating more intense periods of rainfall.

Setting Local Standards

3.4.19 Standards set specific requirements for GI provision that reflect the vision and help to achieve the objectives of the GI strategy. Standards may be area-based, covering the entire local authority planning jurisdiction, or site-specific, to meet particular requirements of individual development sites or priority districts. For development sites, standards can provide a set of output measures so that landowners and developers have certainty over what green infrastructure should be delivered for a particular development site.

3.4.20 Local authorities may choose to adopt national GI standards set out in Natural England's GI Framework or they may prefer to develop their own local GI standards that respond to the local context and meet particular local planning objectives and outcomes. The Strategy Standard and the other Headline Standards that from part of the GI Framework and are included in this Process Guide can be used as the starting point for locally developed policy.

3.4.21 At an area wide-level, standards can provide the overall framework for provision whilst site-based standards can address particular opportunities and constraints within a specific development site.

3.4.22 Section 4 provides an overview of each Headline Green Infrastructure Standard. The User Guides, provide more detail on each standard and set out the specific considerations to take when integrating these into green infrastructure strategies and local policies.

Setting Outcomes, Targets and Indicators

3.4.23 The standards of provision that are set by GI polices provide a framework for establishing suitable indicators and targets that can be measured. Commonly targets should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) and can then form part of a GI Delivery Plan that can accompany a strategy and help measure and monitor progress in achieving the objectives of the strategy.

3.4.24 Targets should include the levels of delivery, or proportional achievement, over time. For instance, the percentage of people having access to good quality publicly accessible greenspaces within 15 minutes' walk from home by 2030, and by 2040, as well as a target date to achieve 100% coverage. These targets can be area wide, to help the council track progress, or location specific, and embedded in site allocation policies. This will be dependent on the anticipated levels of land use change in relation to development feasibility and the ability to achieve the set targets by a particular date.

Desired outcomes from this stage

3.4.25 To ensure that:

- The preparation and adoption of a GI strategy that has a clear vision and is supported by a wide partnership of stakeholders, user groups and communities.
- The drafting and adoption of appropriate GI and local plan policies aligned to descriptions and benefits set out in the GI Principles
- The adoption of appropriate and achievable GI Standards of provision
- The setting of agreed targets and indicators that can be used to measure delivery

3.5 Stage 5 – Integrating the green infrastructure strategy

Overview – aims and objectives

- Ensure GI strategy is integrated with BNG objectives, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and local health strategies
- Incorporate GI Strategies within planning policy, local plans area action plans and supplementary planning guidance
- Draw on landscape character assessments, design guides and codes to make sure GI is appropriate and well-designed
- Coordinate priorities for GI investment across partnerships and stakeholders to support funding and delivery

Integrating GI Strategies with Local Nature Recovery Strategies

3.5.1 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (Defra, 2023a) are a system of spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement, required by law under the Environment Act (HM Government, 2021). Local nature recovery strategy statutory guidance. Each strategy must:

a. agree priorities for nature's recovery.
b. map the most valuable existing areas for nature.
c. map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals.

3.5.2 The main purpose of the LNRS is to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. The focus is on environmental improvement with access etc considered as a desirable co-benefit. The strategies do not force the owners and managers of the

land identified to make any changes but encourage action through greater partnership working and, for example, opportunities for targeted funding and investment. Each Local Nature Recovery Strategy will agree priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities. All LNRS are intended to be published by March 2025.

3.5.3 The relationship between a GI strategy and the LNRS is particularly important and provides opportunities to both maximise synergies and deliver significant benefits for people and wildlife. Whereas the primary focus of a LNRS will be to improve biodiversity, GI strategies will have a broader and more multifunctional approach which is likely to be driven by more social and economic factors such as public health, access, development and recreation.

3.5.4 There are a number of similar processes between the development of a GI strategy and a LNRS and so they can be developed in parallel or be informed by one another. They can use much of the same evidence, involve the same stakeholders, use the same or complementary delivery mechanisms and have some very similar outcomes.

3.5.5 LPAs should integrate with the LNRS process as they develop GI strategies e.g. where LNRS is still under development, use same ecological data where possible to ensure consistency and liaise to understand emerging priorities and proposed actions. Where LNRS has been published, ensure the GI strategy is informed by the data, priorities and mapped measures/actions therein; and makes explicit the interlinkages. This can help to reduce duplication of effort in the preparation of each document.

3.5.6 The Telford and Wrekin Case Study in Appendix 4 describes how Telford and Wrekin Council are seeking to integrate the Local Nature Recovery Strategy with their new GI policies.

Integrating GI Strategies with Local Plans

3.5.7 There is a direct relationship between the GI strategy and the local plan, and this should be evident in defining the scope and objectives of the strategy at the outset as well as its preparation that has been described in Stage 4. The role of the local plan is inevitably more holistic and cross-cutting, and it provides an important mechanism to deliver the objectives and policies of the GI Strategy and to:

- Explain how the policies work in combination
- Where they should be applied geographically

- How the policy can be applied in different circumstances
- Provide opportunities to integrate GI policy objectives throughout the local plan including priorities such as health, transport, employment and housing

3.5.8 The application of the policies in combination is very important. This is because the GI Standards can be met in combination and in a single location - for instance the Urban Greening Factor can include greenspace which can meet Accessible Greenspace Standards, and that site can include trees which can meet the Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard. It will be important to explain this clearly in the local plan so that developers can understand that each GI requirement can be achieved in combination and in an integrated manner and how potential challenges of viability can be addressed.

3.5.9 Explaining where the policies should be applied spatially or geographically is a key factor and should take account of the Green Infrastructure Standards that have been developed with a focus on addressing deficiencies in green infrastructure in urban areas. However, deficiencies also occur in small towns, villages and the urban fringe and so the opportunities to address a lack of GI in different areas will vary.

3.5.10 Dense urban areas may have far fewer opportunities than the urban fringe. Therefore, taking this into account and linking to area types described in design codes will be important. This flexibility means that different design standards for green infrastructure can be applied to different area types but overall can combine to meet an area wide set of standards.

Integrating GI Strategies with Local Design Codes

3.5.11 Local planning authorities can use design codes to incorporate the objectives of the GI strategy and embed these in the development process. The geographic coverage, level of detail and degree of prescription within codes should enable GI to be tailored to the circumstances and scale of change in each place and should allow a suitable degree of variety.

3.5.12 The National Model Design Code (NMDC) (MHCLG, 2021b) provides tools and guidance to local authorities for producing design codes, which promote the use of high-quality design to shape and deliver well-designed places for communities across the country. The NMDC includes sections on Nature (N.1.i - N.3.iii) and Public Space (P.1.i – P.3.ii) and provides an initial framework for incorporating the policy and spatial objectives of the GI Strategy. Local authorities will increasingly be preparing authority wide design codes for the entire local authority area, or more focused area or site-based codes to guide large scale development. This provides an

important opportunity to integrate the GI strategy within site-based planning and design processes supporting the delivery long-term of the strategy.

3.5.13 Design approaches for green infrastructure should be considered for all relevant area types. This can first be reflected in strategic advice in the GI strategy. The Natural England Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide (2023a) then uses ten area types including high streets, urban, suburban, streets, parks and gardens and linear infrastructure. These may correlate or can be used to inform the structure and content of a local design code.

3.5.14 The role of a GI strategy in design terms is therefore to provide the wider understanding and context of an area's landscape and townscape and historic character to create well-designed and distinctive places. The contribution that green infrastructure can make to good design should be clearly stated. Factors such as the scale of change likely in an area and the contribution a location can make to strategic green infrastructure should be key considerations.

Integrating GI Strategies with Design Guides

3.5.15 The Natural England GI Planning and Design Guide (2023a) can help inform the design of GI and can be used alongside the National Design Guide (MHCLG, 2021a), the National Model Design Code (MHCLG, 2021b) and design requirements set out in local design codes prepared by local authorities, landowners, and developers. The Natural England GI Planning and Design Guide describes the Building Blocks of green infrastructure and can provide useful detail on delivering the objectives of the GI strategy. There are clear advantages in integrating the GI strategy and the content of the GI Planning and Design Guide as this provides further and more detailed information on the design and delivery of particular GI elements including sustainable drainage systems, green and blue roofs, green walls, trees in hard landscapes, street furniture and utility structures and traffic-free routes.

3.5.16 A green infrastructure strategy can provide a design framework on which more detailed design guidance can sit. The GI Planning and Design Guide (Natural England, 2023a) sets out what good green infrastructure design looks like and identifies how green infrastructure can contribute to the National Design Guide's (MHCLG, 2021b) ten characteristics of well-designed places. The GI Planning and Design Guide also describes how the Green Infrastructure Standards can be applied in different areas such as urban centres and high streets, urban areas, streets, suburban and rural areas.

Validation checklists

3.5.17 Planning applications represent the closing stage of the planning and design development process and should demonstrate the continuity of GI policy, planning and design objectives. The validation of planning applications for either outline, hybrid or detailed schemes provides an opportunity to demonstrate this continuity and cross-check GI delivery with the strategic objectives set out in the GI strategy. This can ensure that GI is considered fully from the early stages in a planning application. It can also demonstrate practically how the GI standards will be met and delivered, ensuring the right quantity and quality of green infrastructure is in the right location.

Desired outcome from this stage

3.5.18 To ensure:

- Green infrastructure is fully integrated within and across related policy, strategy and guidance documents, including LNRSs.

3.6 Stage 6– Managed, Valued, Monitored and Evaluated

Overview – aims and objectives

- Create a GI delivery plan to coordinate implementation
- Take account of governance and management structures to ensure GI establishment and long- term maintenance
- Identify traditional and innovative funding sources with partners for both capital investment and revenue needs
- Establish targets and performance indicators to measure and monitor agreed GI standards for delivery

GI Stewardship, management and maintenance and the role of a delivery plan

3.6.1 The importance of good management and maintenance is highlighted in the National Design Guide's (MHCLG, 2021a) Lifespan characteristic of well-designed places:

"Good management contributes to the resilience, attractiveness and beauty of a place. Well-designed places are robust, durable and easy to look after. They are designed so management and maintenance responsibilities are clearly defined for all parts of a development.

L1: Well-managed and maintained.
L2: Adaptable to changing needs and evolving technologies.
L3: A sense of ownership."

3.6.2 Management refers to organisational structures and administration, and maintenance is the undertaking of specific/ physical activities to look after green infrastructure assets. Long-term stewardship is an approach to delivering and managing places that can ensure new communities remain places which enable people and the environment to flourish, in perpetuity. (Town and Country Planning Association (2023).

3.6.3 The governance, stewardship, funding, management, maintenance, and monitoring of GI for the long term must be considered from the outset and at all stages of a development or project.

3.6.4 Effective management and maintenance are important for ensuring GI quality, which in turn is key for ensuring that the GI delivers its intended multifunctional benefits. Quality standards are particularly important for ensuring multifunctionality. For example, high quality SuDS and Green Roofs (using existing standards) can deliver multiple services but need to be regularly maintained.

3.6.5 The Green Flag Award advises to engage local businesses and communities in the design and management of green infrastructure. Involving local communities and stakeholders can be valuable to both ensure that the green infrastructure meets local needs and expectations, but also to engage stakeholders in long term support, governance and volunteering activities. Securing commitments around long-term stewardship of green infrastructure is likely to be an important consideration along with a multidisciplinary approach.

3.6.6 The interrelationship between management of different sites to achieve GI outcomes across a landscape such as flood risk, means that a strategic approach to management across land parcels, organisations and boundaries will be necessary. Effective management and a multidisciplinary approach are also required across areas to ensure GI can deliver multifunctional benefits.

3.6.7 Good design can plan for management and maintenance requirements and minimise long-term costs. A strategic approach to GI delivery, funding, stewardship management maintenance and monitoring is therefore needed to ensure that the GI delivers its intended benefits for the long term.

Create a GI delivery framework/ plan to coordinate implementation

3.6.8 Strategic level partnerships such as the GI Strategy Partnership for the local authority area can be well placed to drive and co-ordinate delivery, and support business planning for investment in GI (Please see Stage 1 – Partnerships).

3.6.9 Developing a delivery framework and/or plan will enable co-ordination and translation of GI strategies into delivery on the ground and effective and integrated long-term stewardship, management and maintenance.

3.6.10 Delivery planning should consider the strategic goals, defining what the goals are, where each goal has come from, what the key needs are, and what the main opportunities for projects may be. The plan should also include a list of partners under each strategic goal, indicating how they intend to work together. This process will support governance and stewardship, a long-term sustainable funding model and empower community projects.

3.6.11 Delivery partnerships should identify the enablers to build the capacity needed internally and externally to deliver the vision and strategy e.g. skills and capacity, community participation, partnership collaboration, good quality data, research and analysis, portfolio wide plans, funding models and diverse ways of generating income, and 10-year business plan.

3.6.12 A GI delivery framework and/or plan aims to set out clear governance and the 'what, where, when, how and with whom' for GI delivery. It should identify the building blocks to implementing the GI strategy – e.g. plans, strategies and tools that may need to be developed in conjunction with the GI strategy such as a natural capital account, parks audits and analysis, GI mapping tool, built infrastructure condition survey, asset management strategy, capital investment programme, sense of place, volunteer strategy and action plan, marketing and communications strategy, financial model, income generation strategy proposals, grounds maintenance service review, operational structure, and approaches to organisational change e.g. appreciative inquiry.

3.6.13 It can be useful to set a series of delivery principles in response to the overall vision and priorities for the place. These can be based on the GI Principles, and, for example, they may refer to connectivity, urban greening, accessibility, and multi-functionality, advocating green infrastructure benefits. This can provide a starting point for developing actions to implement the strategy over time.

3.6.14 Against each principle, the Partnership can consider the key opportunities, the change the public would like to see, and priority projects. This may involve pilot

projects to test different approaches through to transformative, large scale change projects. When developing a programme of individual projects, it could be useful to divide the local authority area into zones and focus on priority areas.

3.6.15 Stakeholders and community engagement will be a central driver in the planning and delivery Framework to ensure that the priorities meet local and user needs. Involving local communities and stakeholders can be valuable to engage stakeholders in long-term support, governance and volunteering activities.

3.6.16 Additional protection measures are not always necessary but can be considered where there is very limited greenspace, or there is a likelihood of greenspace being lost. There are various mechanisms by which land can be protected as GI, through designation or ownership Such as Local Green Space designations, Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, which are all potential ways to offer protection. Local Nature Reserve status enables creation of byelaws to help manage harmful activities. Greenspaces can be protected through Fields in Trust with a Deed of Dedication. Dedication under section 16 of the CROW Act 2000 (HM Government, 2000) can provide open access land. Creation of land-owning trusts and conservation covenants, offer long-term ways of protecting space with recreational and/or wildlife value and avenues for maintenance fundings.

3.6.17 Further guidance on taking a strategic approach to GI delivery and long-term stewardship is available at:

- Building with Nature - a resource that gives planners and developers evidence-based, how-to guidance on delivering good green infrastructure.
- Garden Communities Toolkit - Homes England
- Making Stewardship Happen: A Process Guide for Councils (Town and Country Planning Association May 2023). This Guide is designed primarily for local authorities and their private sector delivery partners who are planning for new and renewed communities at scale. However, much of the information and key learning is relevant to anyone considering the role of long-term stewardship in their area.

Management and maintenance in new developments

3.6.18 Local plan green infrastructure policies can include requirements for management and maintenance – please see the Uttlesford policy in Appendix 5.

3.6.19 Management and maintenance can be included by local authorities in Developers checklists, listing the information that must be submitted with all planning

applications. Checklists can also be used in pre-application discussions with Planning Officers, in order to agree on the information required for the application.

3.6.20 The long-term management and maintenance should be considered in the viability assessment of the site.

3.6.21 The master planning stage provides opportunities to optimise the GI design, and delivery of multiple benefits but also to identify the likely management and maintenance costs and identify design solutions to suit the budget early on.

3.6.22 Site management plans and funding for any development proposals will need to incorporate the long-term management and maintenance of GI. Arrangements agreed and secured alongside planning permissions can ensure that assets maintain their functions and benefits. These can include for example that landscapes, planting and species that are selected as part of the GI design should allow for effective for long-term low-cost management and maintenance, as well as delivering other GI multiple functions and benefits (Essex GI Standards Technical Guidance, Essex County Council, 2022).

3.6.23 Governance options for long-term stewardship or of GI in major new developments, include:

- Adoption and management by Local Authority or Parish Council
- Management companies
- Community trust / Community Interest Companies
- Housing associations
- Charities

Valued and Funded

3.6.25 A GI Strategy can help to secure funding by demonstrating the importance of GI.

3.6.26 Green infrastructure is most likely to be successful where there is a mix or blend of the public, private and third sector funding instruments, working together. Of particular importance for financing green infrastructure is an understanding of which types of funding can be used for which types of intervention and to develop a strategy that is suited to the project or mix of projects that are to be financed.

New green funding and finance mechanisms

3.6.27 New green funding and finance mechanisms are emerging on a regular basis, and this is a space in constant innovation. Carbon Credits, Green Recovery funds, and Biodiversity Net Gain, which offers funding over a 30-year period, can all help to address the need for revenue funding for management and maintenance.

3.6.28 The list below sets out a range of funding options that can be considered.

- **Public Grant or Legislation**: e.g. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG); Nutrient Neutrality; Business Improvement Districts; National Lottery Heritage Fund and Community Fund
- **Third Sector Funding:** Environmental NGOs (e.g. National Trust); Charities (e.g. Wildlife Trusts); other Philanthropic Trusts and Foundations: e.g. Esmee Fairbairn Foundation; University Collaborations; Social Enterprise; Crowd sourcing
- **Corporate Sponsorship, ESG, CSR Funding**
- **Payments for Ecosystems Services**: e.g. Environmental Land Management Scheme; Woodland Carbon Code (Forestry Commission); Peatland Codes
- **Enterprise and earned income**: e.g. refreshments in parks; fishing licenses, endowments from commercial enterprises
- **Individual giving and philanthropy**

3.6.29 GI delivery leads will need to develop a customised blend of finance options to suit each project, the partners and the funds available. A Delivery Plan, partnerships and governance, and funding sources will need to be responsive to the priorities and needs of the local area.

3.6.30 The Future Parks Accelerator (led by National Trust, National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)) have explored innovative approaches to urban greenspace finance with the aim to build a sustainable future for the UK's urban parks and green spaces. They have shared the learning through a series of guides, videos and 10-point plans, see the Future Parks Resources Hub.

3.6.31 The Green Finance Institute's Investment Readiness Toolkit is an online and interactive framework that takes nature-based project developers and enterprises along the eight milestones of a path to 'Investment Readiness', providing key considerations and case studies.

3.6.32 Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA) (Defra, 2020) can help to find the right approach to valuing green infrastructure, to measure the benefits provided by natural assets in a way in which gives decision makers at all levels the tools and the evidence to make more informed joined up decisions. Increasingly green

infrastructure is seen as a mechanism to address environmental justice and equity. Demonstrating that the benefits of green infrastructure can be attributed to those most in need should ideally be included in valuation processes.

3.6.33 A good case study in demonstrating the value of nature is the National Trust research (Dickie et al, 2023, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund) into the value of urban greenspace in the North of England to inform Nature North's thinking about how to generate larger-scale investment in urban nature and green spaces, and how to encourage ambitious leadership. The research findings showed that the current economic value of accessible urban green spaces is at least **£2.7 billion** per annum in the North. Over a 60-year period this adds up to almost **£80 billion** benefit to the Northern economy. Consultants have calculated how different actions could increase this value, for both individuals and society. By modelling realistic improvements such as increasing the overall amount of accessible urban green space by 14%, improving the habitat mix in existing and new green spaces, and connecting green spaces through 'green corridors', they have estimated that the uplift in value to the North's economy could be worth an additional £11 billion over the next 60 years. (National Trust 2024)

3.6.34 Greater Manchester Combined Authority carried out a natural capital account and valuation (2021) which showed that the total value provided by natural environment in Greater Manchester is at least £1 billion each year. In terms of air quality regulation, vegetation there improves air quality which prevents 370 Hospital admissions each year and helps avoid 1200 life years lost.

3.6.35 Oxfordshire County Council commissioned a report on 'Making the case for investment in Green Infrastructure in Oxfordshire Policymaker summary' (2021), which sets out the strategic case for investment in Green Infrastructure. It provides evidence on the significant contribution Green Infrastructure can make to the County's sustainability challenges, its economic development, sustainable housing and social wellbeing.

3.6.36 Some useful sources of information about funding approaches are listed below.

- Investment Readiness Toolkit by the Green Finance Institute (2024)
- Alternative funding mechanisms for green space (De Bell et al, 2021)
- Set Up an Urban Habitat Bank – 10 step Guide – (Future Parks Accelerator)
- Nature Recovery Toolkit (Planning Advisory Service, 2024)

Monitored and Evaluated

3.6.37 It will be important to monitor and evaluate how green infrastructure policies and strategy are performing over time. In terms of what to monitor the Green Infrastructure Headline Standards (2023b) should be used in conjunction with Why and What Principles, and targets developed in stage three above. The Natural England Green Infrastructure Headline Standards set out that green infrastructure delivered within (or associated with) major new developments should be managed, maintained and monitored for a minimum of 30 years.

3.6.38 The Green Infrastructure Mapping Database can be used to provide a baseline over which change can be monitored. Other resources such as the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Defra, 2023b) and Natural Capital indicators can also be used for assessment. They can provide measurable properties which can be used to understand the state of natural assets, how they are changing, and how this relates to benefits of green infrastructure.

3.6.39 Improving the quality of data underpinning green infrastructure policies can help with monitoring their effectiveness. Citizen Science is one way of improving the quality and quantity of local data and mapping and monitoring of green infrastructure assets. For example, Forest Research is developing its urban tree cover map using citizen science processes.

3.6.40 Evaluation of policy and green infrastructure provision will require quantitative and qualitative data. These should be set against:

- The extent to which needs and priorities established in stage 2 have been covered in green infrastructure policies.
- If Green Infrastructure Standards e.g. the Accessible Greenspace Standard (AGS) and Urban Greening Factor (UGF), are being met and what the trajectory is.
- The implementation of locally set standards and targets to meet needs
- Performance against user survey information
- Delivery against a theory of change

3.6.41 Frequency of evaluation may vary depending on the level of land use change in an area and the levels of need. Dovetailing evaluation into other review processes is likely to reduce duplication of effort and provide more joined up results. Local Planning Authorities should aim to report progress against green infrastructure targets every five years. Learning from the evaluation and monitoring should prompt adaptive management and refining of the plans and policies.

Monitoring and Evaluation of GI at site level

3.6.42 Monitoring and evaluation of GI in developments can help to ensure that GI is maintained for the lifetime of the development and as outlined in any approved Maintenance Plan. It can be helpful for the monitoring actions to be shared between the Local Planning Authority and developer. For example, the Essex Design Guide includes a planning condition that:

'The applicant or any successor in title must maintain yearly logs of maintenance which should be carried out in accordance with any approved Maintenance plan. These must be available for inspection upon request by the Local Planning Authority.' (Essex County Council, 2022)

Desired outcomes from this stage

3.6.43 To ensure:

- Governance and management processes are in place for green infrastructure
- Maintenance for green infrastructure regimes for good green infrastructure are established
- Long term monitoring and evaluation processes are in place for green infrastructure policies and sites

4.0 Headline Standards

4.1 The Headline Green Infrastructure Standards are a key component of the Green Infrastructure Framework. They are voluntary. They define what good green infrastructure 'looks like' for local planners, developers, parks and greenspace managers and communities, and how to plan it strategically to deliver multiple benefits for people and nature. The Standards should be considered throughout the six-stage process of developing Green Infrastructure Strategies and Policies, when used together, these Green Infrastructure Standards will help stakeholders to deliver the 15 Green Infrastructure Principles and enable everyone to benefit from good green infrastructure provision.

4.2 This section provides an overview of each standard and the recommended levels of achievement for area wide application and major new developments. User guides with further information are detailed in appendices.

S1. Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard

4.3 Area wide:

- Local authorities, working in partnership with stakeholders including local communities, assess and strategically plan their green infrastructure provision, for example as part of a Green Infrastructure Strategy. Plans set out how green infrastructure will help to create greener, beautiful, healthier and more prosperous neighbourhoods, with a thriving nature network that can reduce air and water pollution, support sustainable drainage and help places adapt to climate change.

- In doing this, they apply the 15 Green Infrastructure Principles and the Green Infrastructure Standards locally (adapting them to local context where appropriate) and set green infrastructure policies, proposals and development requirements in development plans and local design codes. Local authorities set SMART targets in a Delivery Plan for achieving the Green Infrastructure Framework Standards and local policies over time, as well as arrangements for the long-term management and maintenance of all green infrastructure.

- Plan and monitor and evaluate progress against delivery of these local targets every five years.

4.4 Major development:

- Each major new development has a Green Infrastructure Plan (which may be part of a Design and Access Statement) setting out how the development will deliver the Green Infrastructure Framework's 15 Green Infrastructure Principles and the Green Infrastructure Standards as set out in local green infrastructure policies, proposals and development requirements in development plans and local design codes. The green infrastructure delivered within (or associated with) major new developments should be managed, maintained and monitored for a minimum of 30 years.

S2. Accessible Greenspace Standards, including Quality Standards

4.5 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, to meet the AGS size and proximity criteria, with an initial focus on access to green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home.

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

4.6 Major development:

- Accessible Greenspace Standards – Size Proximity criteria: For all major residential developments, the local authority specifies to the developer the quantity, size and distance criteria for any accessible greenspace to be provided within/ associated with the development, based on the Accessible Greenspace Standards.

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

- 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) in major new developments.

S3. Urban Nature Recovery Standard

4.7 Area-wide:

- In urban and urban fringe areas, the proportion of green infrastructure that is designed and managed for nature recovery is increased by an agreed percentage based on a locally defined baseline and taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints. This includes the creation and restoration of wildlife rich habitats, which can contribute to the delivery of local nature recovery objectives.

- Local authorities in urban and urban fringe areas set targets for nature recovery through provision and sustainable management of Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites, to: - Provide 1 hectare of Local Nature

Reserve (LNR) per 1,000 population (for nature conservation and quiet enjoyment). - Enhance existing and identify new areas that qualify as Local Wildlife Sites (for nature conservation).

4.8 Major Development:

- The developer identifies in the Green Infrastructure Plan for the development (or in the Design and Access Statement, as appropriate), its contribution to nature recovery and the creation and restoration of 22 wildlife rich habitats, which can contribute to the delivery of local nature recovery objectives, including the potential for creation or enhancement of Local Nature Reserves or Local Wildlife Sites.

S4. Urban Greening Factor Standard

4.9 Area-wide:

- Urban greening is at least 40% average green cover in urban residential neighbourhoods where they do not already meet that standard. There is no net loss of green cover in urban neighbourhoods.

4.10 Major Development:

- Major development meets National Urban Greening Factors of at least 0.3 for commercial development, 0.4 for residential development, (and, where appropriate, 0.5 for residential greenfield development).

S5. Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

4.11 Area-wide:

- Urban Tree Canopy Cover is increased by an agreed percentage based on a locally defined baseline and taking into account local needs, opportunities and constraints

4.12 Major Development

- Major residential and commercial development is designed to meet these targets • New and existing trees are incorporated into new developments and new streets are tree lined (in line with NPPF requirements)

5.0 Supporting Information

5.1 Natural England has developed a number of resources to support the Green Infrastructure Framework. These are available on the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework and Standards for England website and consist of:

- The 15 Principles of Green Infrastructure
- The Green Infrastructure Mapping Database and User Guide
- The Headline Green Infrastructure Standards
- The Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide
- Training videos and Case studies

5.2 A Guidance, Standards and Tools Table has been developed, in Appendix 6, with a comprehensive list of links to tools, guidance and standards which can be used for developing a GI strategy and delivery good green infrastructure.

Introducing the Appendices

Table 5 – Table introducing the Appendix numbers, titles and overview of each.

Appendix	Title	Overview
	Accessible Greenspace Standard User Guide	User guide for applying the Accessible Greenspace Standard.
	Urban Greening Factor for England	User guide for applying the Urban Greening Factor Standard.
	Urban Nature Recovery Standard User Guide	User guide for applying the Urban Nature Recovery Standard.
	Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard User Guide	User guide for applying the Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard. Note - This guide is in development and will be available in due course.

Appendix	Title	Overview
1	Policy Context	Core policy drivers of the Green Infrastructure Framework and Headline Standards.
2	Data 'Wish List' for GI strategy	Comprehensive set of evidence to develop a green infrastructure strategy.
3	GI Policy Review checklist	Short checklist tool for Local Planning Authorities to self-assess their draft Local Plan GI policies.
4	Case studies	Case studies presenting how Local Authorities are using and embedding the Green Infrastructure Framework into local strategy.
5	GI Policy examples	Good practise examples of GI policies to showcase how elements of the Green Infrastructure Framework can be incorporated.
6	Guidance, Standards and Tools Table	Comprehensive list of governmental and non-governmental guidance, standards and tools for developing and delivery good green infrastructure.

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Glossary

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development and/or land management that leaves nature in a measurably better state. The Environment Act 2021 requires that new development delivers a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity, compared to the level before. Biodiversity Net Gain Brochure

Green Infrastructure (GI) Plan

A GI Delivery Plan or Framework aims to set out clear governance and the 'what, where, when, how and with whom' for delivering projects, identifying key stakeholders and partners, funding, communications and engagement, and including monitoring and evaluation. Developing a delivery plan will enable co-ordination and translation of green infrastructure strategies into delivery on the ground and long-term stewardship. They can be an effective tool for integration of GI delivery, management and stewardship.

Green Infrastructure

A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity. (National Planning Policy Framework 2021).

It includes both green and blue infrastructure such as:

- Parks and Gardens – urban parks, country and regional parks, formal gardens
- Amenity Greenspace – informal recreation spaces, housing greenspaces, domestic gardens, village greens, urban commons, other incidental space
- Natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces - woodland and scrub, grassland, heath or moor, wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and disturbed ground
- Green corridors – rivers and canals including their banks, road and rail corridors, green bridges, field margins, cycling routes, pedestrian paths, and rights of way
- Vegetated sustainable drainage systems, SuDS, (please see definition of SuDs later in this glossary). Includes: green roofs, blue roofs, rainwater harvesting and smart controls, downpipe disconnection planters, rain gardens and biofiltration strips, swales, ponds, detention basins
- Features for species such as bird and bat boxes, swift bricks and hedgehog holes

- Other - street trees, allotments, community gardens and orchards, private gardens, city farms, green walls, cemeteries and churchyards+

Greening towns and cities

Increasing and enhancing urban nature and greenspaces; including wider environmental improvements e.g. reducing pollution and positive environmental behaviours such as recycling and public transport etc.

Greenspace

There are many definitions of greenspace in use. The definition of greenspace for the GI Framework is as follows:

- Greenspace is an area of vegetation that is set within a landscape or townscape. Greenspace can include blue space (i.e. lakes, rivers and wetlands), and may include built environment features.
- Greenspace is not necessarily accessible to the public e.g. greenspaces include allotments (that are normally locked and only accessible to key holders), and golf courses (which may require club membership and or payment of a fee to access). Such greenspace has a significant role to play in the overall provision of greenspaces for recreation and enjoyment.
- High quality greenspace is designed and managed to deliver its intended functions and to meet defined needs. Greenspace may be urban or rural.

Headline Standards

The top level of standards in the Green Infrastructure Framework and comprise:

- Green Infrastructure Strategy Standard
- Accessible Greenspace Standards
- Urban Nature Recovery Standards
- Urban Greening Factor Standard
- Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

Local Authority

A Local authority is an organisation performing the services of local government. The structure of local government varies from area to area in England. In some areas there are two layers or tiers: a District, Borough or City Council as the lower tier. In other areas there is just a single tier made up of a ' Unitary Authority '.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

A Local Nature Recovery Strategy sets out priorities for nature recovery and proposes actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities. There are 48 strategy areas that cover the whole of England. In each area a Responsible Authority was appointed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to lead on preparing the local nature recovery strategy.

Responsible authorities work with other organisations and partners in their area to agree what should be included in their local nature recovery strategy. They identify practical, achievable proposals developed with the input of people who know and understand the area, especially landowners and managers. The format of LNRSs will vary but will include a local habitat map and a written statement of biodiversity priorities.

Local Nature Reserves (LNR)

Local Nature Reserves are usually declared (designated) by local councils but parish and town councils can also declare LNRs if they have the powers to do so delegated to them. LNRs can be large or small and be created where there are wildlife or geological features that are of special local interest. They must have a management plan. LNRs are intended for people and wildlife and used for purposes such as habitat management, quiet recreation, study and to interact with nature and enjoy it.

Maintenance of GI

GI maintenance is the undertaking of specific physical activities to look after green infrastructure assets.

Management of GI

Management refers to the organisational structures and administration of GI assets.

Multifunctionality

The ability to perform more than one function at the same time e.g. for nature, health and wellbeing, climate and prospering communities. In terms of green infrastructure this can mean providing opportunities for recreation whilst delivering biodiversity, contributing to flood risk management, and reducing urban heat stress through shading and cooler greenspaces.

National Nature Reserve

NNRs are managed for wildlife by the statutory nature conservation bodies, or other approved bodies. There are around 400 NNRs across the UK. There is a presumption against development on NNRs.

Nature Recovery

Halting and reversing the loss of species and habitats; and enhancing sites that are designated for nature conservation and other wildlife-rich places. Newly created and restored wildlife-rich habitats, corridors and stepping-stones will benefit nature recovery by helping wildlife populations to grow and move.

Standard

'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.

Long-term Stewardship

Long-term stewardship is an approach to delivering and managing places that can ensure new communities remain places which enable people and the environment to flourish, in perpetuity. (Town and Country Planning Association (2023)

Sustainable Drainage Systems, SuDS

Sustainable drainage systems slow the rate of surface water run-off and improve infiltration, by mimicking natural drainage in both rural and urban areas. This reduces the risk of "flash-flooding" which occurs when rainwater rapidly flows into the public sewerage and drainage systems. SuDS use natural features wherever possible.

Supressed demand

Suppressed demand is a desire to consume a product or service but due to barriers this desire is not met.

GI Target

In the context of the GI Framework, GI targets are short-term performance goals or objectives to track the progress of GI strategies towards achieving the Headline GI or other Standards.

Urban

Urban means belonging to, or relating to, a city or town. The following Census definitions have been used to define urban for the GI Framework in terms of Geographic Information

System information: i.e. the LSOA rural-urban classification dataset (Census 2011) has been used including the following RUC 2011 classifications:

- Urban Major Conurbation
- Urban Minor Conurbation
- Urban City and Town

This created an Urban Mapping Domain of about 25,000 km2 across England (approximately 20% of the country).

Urban Fringe

The urban fringe is the transition zone between a city and its suburbs, and the countryside. It contains a mixture of land use including residential areas, recreational facilities such as golf courses and farming.

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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