

Houlton, Warwickshire

Green Infrastructure Framework case study



The Houlton housing development, to the east of Rugby in Warwickshire, will create over 6,200 new homes designed with high-quality green infrastructure at its core. Built on the site of the Rugby radio station, demolished in 2007. It showcases the success of Natural England's Accessible Greenspace Standard.



Map produced from the England Green Infrastructure Mapping Database on 13/01/2025.
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What was the vision?

A high-quality housing development with easy access to natural landscape, schools and good infrastructure. A beautiful nature-rich place to live with greenspace accessible by the whole community. Bringing people and nature together and connecting with a wider nature recovery network.

How did the Green Infrastructure Framework help to realise the vision?

Although Houlton pre-dates the Green Infrastructure Framework, it demonstrates what a landscape-led approach can achieve. The delivery team are extremely proud to have met the Accessible Greenspace Standard, the Urban Nature Recovery Standard and the Urban Greening Factor Standard. By working in partnership with parish councils, community groups, elected members and neighbouring residents, a place has been created that truly fits with Rugby and its existing communities.



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Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are a key aspect of the development.



24 hectares of open spaces and sports pitches provide play opportunities for toddlers and older children.



An extensive network of walkways and cycleways connects the community and supports active lifestyles.



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Every resident can access at least 2 hectares of greenspace within 300 metres of their home. Most can access 10 hectares.



The design achieves 50% green cover and a Biodiversity Net Gain score of 27%.



Strong green network throughout the development with connections to a wider nature recovery network.

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What's been achieved?

Taking a protect, retain and enhance approach to biodiversity has locked in 50% green cover from the outset. Every resident can access at least 2 hectares of greenspace within 300 metres of their home, thus achieving the Local Greenspace Standards within Natural England's Accessible Greenspace Standard. Most can access 10 hectares. The design has delivered a Biodiversity Net Gain score of 27%, and is looking to see an upward trend as new phases come on board.

Great Crested Newts have been protected with a network of green corridors. A vast network of cycle and footpaths encourages active travel. Meadows, play spaces, canal routes, sustainable urban drainage systems and ponds, provide natural habitats and amenity spaces where people can benefit from the well-evidenced health and wellbeing benefits of time spent in nature. Existing orchard trees were retained wherever possible and traditional varieties of apple have been used in micro-orchards. Native fruit trees attract pollinators and provide an edible resource for residents.

What were the problems to overcome?

There has been an opportunity to explore what can be done to make the development more climate resilient. For example, to reduce the risk of surface water flooding during heavy rainfall and to provide shade during heatwaves. Plenty of street trees are used as standard, using a wide variety of trees to avoid an overreliance on a single species. Swales, ponds and water courses are a really beautiful and integral part of what makes Houlton so special, and as well as their visual appeal, they collect surface run off and replenish ground water.

What lessons have been learnt?

Green infrastructure delivers customer satisfaction and homes with quality greenspace sell faster and for a better price. Integrating high-quality green infrastructure into a design can also speed up planning permission applications and save money through certainty.

How was the green infrastructure strategy funded?

Houlton is built to a long-term model, where the developers keep an interest in the site. They are prepared to invest more upfront and wait longer for their commercial reward. A £35.5m loan from the government's "housing accelerator" Homes England has been helpful in achieving this.

How is the infrastructure being managed and funded going forward?

Open spaces are maintained by a management company, who charge all residents an annual fee.



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Green Infrastructure Framework Principles: The benefits

1. Nature-rich, beautiful places

From the outset, Houlton has been designed as a beautiful place with easy access to natural landscapes, bringing people together with nature. The design locked in 50% green cover from the outset and a Biodiversity Net Gain score of 27%.

2. Active and healthy places

Greenspace provision meets the Local Greenspace Standards within Natural England's Accessible Greenspace Standard, with an extensive network of green infrastructure supports active lifestyles, community cohesion and nature connections, benefiting physical health, mental health & wellbeing and quality of life.

3. Thriving and prospering communities

Houlton's green infrastructure helps to create and support a prospering community that benefits everyone. It adds value by creating a quality environment that supports the local economy and regeneration.

4. Improved water management

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are a key aspect of the green infrastructure at Houlton, reducing flood risk, improving water quality and natural filtration.

5. Resilient and climate positive places

Green infrastructure makes places more resilient and adaptive to climate change and helps to meet zero carbon and air quality targets. There has been a great opportunity at Houlton to explore what can be done to make the development more climate resilient, through, for example, sustainable drainage and tree planting. Plenty of street trees are used as standard, using a wide variety of trees to avoid an overreliance on a single species. Swales, ponds and water courses collect surface run off and replenish ground water.

Green Infrastructure Framework Principles: The attributes

1. Multifunctional

Houlton's green infrastructure delivers a range of functions and benefits for people and nature. Promotes healthy lifestyles with access to nature on the doorstep.

2. Varied

The green infrastructure provides a variety of types and sizes of green and blue spaces, green routes and environmental features. These include informal play opportunities, civic spaces, productive landscapes, hedges and a medieval ridge and furrow system is preserved on Normandy Hill.

3. Connected

A network of paths and cycle routes connects communities across the site and links with the wider landscape. There are over 1.5km of connected wildlife corridors.

4. Accessible

Taking a protect, retain and enhance approach to biodiversity has locked in 50% green cover from the outset. Every resident can access at least 2 hectares of greenspace within 300 metres of their home, most can access 10 hectares, thus achieving the Local Greenspace Standards within Natural England's Accessible Greenspace Standard.

5. Character

Inherited assets have been retained and restored wherever possible and Houlton's local history celebrated. For example, the former Rugby radio station is now a school and Dollman Farm has been retained as a community hub. Trees have been retained wherever possible and local varieties of apples, such as the rare Warwickshire variety Wyken Pippin, have been reintroduced. A custom suite of street furniture was developed with a local carpenter.

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Green Infrastructure Framework Principles: The process

1. Partnership and vision

By working in partnership with parish councils, community groups, elected members and neighbouring residents, a place has been created that truly fits with Rugby and its existing communities.

2. Evidence

The residents of Houlton will benefit from the well-evidenced health and wellbeing benefits of time spent in nature. Redrow have spent time listening to what prospective buyers want, in a survey undertaken in 2021, 95% of respondents said they were looking for greenspaces close to where they live.

3. Plan strategically

Quality green infrastructure, accessible by the whole community has been a key strategic goal. The priority has been to integrate the new development within the existing landscape, focusing on creating spaces that enhance the quality of life for residents and support the natural environment.

4. Design

As the lead landscape architects for Houlton, Bradley Murphy Design contributed significantly to the concept and detailed design of the green infrastructure. Design codes set the high landscaping standards required across the development to create a well-designed, beautiful and distinctive place.

5. Managed, valued, monitored and evaluated

Good management planned from the outset is essential to secure the green infrastructure for the long-term. Open spaces at Houlton are maintained by a management company, who charge all residents an annual fee.

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Delivered by:

**Urban&Civic
in partnership with
Bradley Murphy Design
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