



Our green places and spaces



6.1 The borough's 'green infrastructure' covers a wide range of green spaces and land. There are important open spaces in the urban area, with land offering a variety of benefits to people and to wildlife. In addition, a significant proportion of the borough is covered by Green Belt which contains land performing different functions.

We need to think about how we balance pressures for new development against protecting and enhancing these important assets, to help provide the wide range of environmental, economic and quality of life benefits that green infrastructure and the Green Belt bring to local communities.

Green spaces

Current context

6.2 Natural England defines green infrastructure (GI) as 'a strategically planned and delivered network comprising the broadest range of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multi-functional resource capable of delivering those ecological services and quality of life benefits required by the communities it serves and needed to underpin sustainability. Its design and management should also respect and enhance the character and distinctiveness of an area with regard to habitats and landscape types.'

6.3 The provision of GI in and around urban areas is now widely recognised as contributing towards creating places where people want to live and work. Its concept is embodied in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) and the GMSF and is an essential component of good planning for urban and rural areas. GI is particularly important in addressing climate change, through the need for sustainable drainage, in tackling urban heat island impacts and in the provision of sustainable transport routes. GI is also a key element of maintaining and enhancing 'Natural Capital'. Natural Capital refers to the stock of natural resources and the economic value they represent in the goods and services they provide.

Table 1 Benefits of Green Infrastructure

Benefits of Green Infrastructure		
Prosperity	People	Places
Economic Growth and Investment	Health and Wellbeing	Biodiversity
Land and Property Values	Recreation and Leisure	Flood Alleviation and Management
Labour Productivity	Quality of Place	Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation
Tourism	Food Growing	Improved public realm
Products of the Land	Educational Resource	Improved air quality

6.4 The NPPF requires that local plans should do a number of things in relation to green infrastructure including:

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- Setting out a strategic approach which plans positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure;
- Planning for biodiversity at a landscape scale, across local authority boundaries;
- Identifying and mapping components of the local ecological networks;
- Promoting the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identifying suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan; and
- Contributing to and enhancing the natural and local environment by recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services (the wide variety of ecosystems that exist).

6.5 Work across Greater Manchester has identified the broad habitats of 'river valleys and canals', 'woodlands and trees' and 'major parks and green spaces' as having the highest value in terms of Stockport's ecosystem. River valleys have long been recognised as having particular importance in the area.

River valleys and canals

6.6 These provide benefits by way of: Surface Water and Fluvial Flood Management; Water Quality Management; Public Recreation and Green Travel Routes, and Wildlife and Habitat Conservation. Consequently, various ways in which we could look to enhance them include: improving water quality; re-naturalising rivers and waterways; and improving public access to waterways, including improving opportunities for sustainable travel along them.

Woodlands and trees

6.7 The Greater Manchester Tree Audit (2011) indicates that Stockport has the most tree cover across Greater Manchester with close to 25 per cent cover, including some ancient woodland.

6.8 Woodlands and trees provide benefits through recreation, carbon storage and capture and flood mitigation. We could, therefore, look at new tree planting, positive woodland management, including clough woodland as promoted in the GMSF, and management of recreational pressures as a way to support this.

Major parks and green space

Bruntwood Park



6.9 These contribute to the ecosystem service through: the provision of public recreation and green travel routes; surface water and fluvial flood management; water quality management and wildlife; and habitat conservation. In order to improve them, opportunities potentially exist through investment in improving access to those spaces and in their management.

6.10 The recent open space study identified the popularity of parks, finding that a high proportion of respondents visit parks more than once a week

(52%). The majority of parks are assessed as being of high value, with the important social inclusion and health benefits, ecological value and sense of place these sites offer being fully acknowledged.

6.11 The contribution of green infrastructure to flood risk management is referred to in the Flood risk and sustainable drainage part of this chapter.

Planning for the future

6.12 Current local policy sets out how the council is working with developers and partners to protect, develop and enhance an integrated network of GI, but currently policy does not provide specific details.

6.13 Stockport has Supplementary Planning documents relating to: Sustainable Design and Construction; Recreational Open Space Provision and Commuted Sums and Design of Residential Development, which collectively provide advice on how to include GI within development proposals.

6.14 Stockport has a well-established and robust system of sites designated for their nature conservation value. These sites include:

- Nationally protected sites ('Sites of Special Scientific Interest' and 'National Nature Reserves');
- Local Wildlife Sites, including 'Sites of Biological Importance' and 'Local Nature Reserves';
- 'Green Chains', for retaining the wildlife and recreational value of linked green space.

6.15 In addition, five river valleys in Stockport are identified as 'Landscape Character Areas'.

6.16 Work was undertaken on a 'Stockport Town Centre Urban GI Enhancement Strategy', which has made key recommendations, including: increased tree planting; more creative management of water and the inclusion of vegetation in building design. In addition, it suggests producing planning guidelines to enable the future approval of planning applications that will enhance and increase green infrastructure.

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6.17 Some of the key issues in this regard are:

- Many remaining species-rich and important natural habitats are small and fragmented;
- Opportunities for contributing to and enhancing the GI network are currently being missed;
- There are significant deficiencies in terms of access to the GI network across the borough.

Flood Risk and Sustainable Drainage

Current context

6.18 Stockport has suffered the effects of flooding in recent times, with significant effects on people's homes, businesses and on the transport network. Green infrastructure can serve to manage flood risk by way of natural approaches such as sustainable drainage methods. Such approaches could include, for example, green roofs and walls and attenuation ponds.

6.19 The NPPF has as one of its core planning principles support for the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and recognising that some open land can perform many functions, including flood risk mitigation.

6.20 The NPPF requires local authorities to adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change, taking full account of flood risk and to take account of climate change over the longer term, again including factors such as flood risk. It notes the key role planning plays in providing resilience to the impacts of climate change. Local authorities should develop policies to manage flood risk, taking account of advice from the Environment Agency.

6.21 The NPPF also sets out tests which aims to steer new development to areas with the lowest probability of flooding or to allow development which provides wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh flood risk (the 'Sequential Test' and the 'Exceptions Test'). It also requires the safeguarding of land from development that is required for current and future flood management.

6.22 Flood zone information is provided by the Environment Agency and is subject to quarterly changes.

6.23 The NPPF requires the planning system to remediate and mitigate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land. There may be sensitive uses e.g. housing and schools next to potential sources of pollution.

6.24 The Draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework provides a number of proposed policies on a wide range of flood risk and water quality issues, including sustainable drainage systems, managing and reducing flood risk, and enhancing the resilience of areas at risk of flooding.

Planning for the future

6.25 Current local policy indicates that all development will be expected to comply with the approach set out in the NPPF and its accompanying Technical Guidance. Reference is made to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for Stockport (SFRA) as providing the necessary evidence to back up the sequential and exceptions tests set out in the NPPF. In addition current policy sets requirements for sustainable drainage within 'Critical Drainage Areas' (CDAs), when these areas are identified.