

Executive summary

What is green infrastructure?

The Haven Gateway sub-region has been set challenging growth targets in the Draft East of England Plan and has, for this reason, recently been afforded New Growth Point status by the Government.

The Haven Gateway Partnership is confident it can deliver this growth in accordance with the objectives of the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan. However, a key component of achieving sustainability will be the sub-region's ability to deliver a multi-functional greenspace network or 'green infrastructure'. Production of a Green Infrastructure Strategy was a condition of New Growth Point status for the Haven Gateway.

Green infrastructure is a connected system of protected sites, nature reserves, greenspaces and greenway linkages. By providing for multi-functional uses, e.g. wildlife, recreation, and cultural experience, green infrastructure contributes to quality of life whilst also delivering landscape, historic and ecological benefits. Green infrastructure will be particularly important in settlements and surrounding areas proposed for regionally or sub-regionally significant development.

Our vision

To establish a framework for the delivery of high quality green infrastructure over the next 20 years, complementing and supporting planned housing and development growth.

To contribute to quality of life through ensuring that everyone living and working in the Haven Gateway has access to a high quality natural and historic environment.

The success of these aims can only be secured by sustained support by all communities of interest in Haven Gateway namely all the partner local authorities, developers, residents, businesses, central and regional government and government agencies, and the voluntary sector.

Principles

The principles have been developed by the Steering Group and will guide planning, design and maintenance of the green infrastructure network. The overarching principles are to:

- integrate green infrastructure provision and management into development proposals
- champion the role that green infrastructure assets play in delivering a high quality of life
- promote an integrated approach to green infrastructure provision and management that provides recreational opportunities for people whilst maintaining and enhancing the exceptional natural and historic environment within the Haven Gateway
- create green infrastructure that reflects the ethos and character of the Haven Gateway
- increase everyone's understanding of, and ability to take action for, green infrastructure

These principles are elaborated under the themes of access, biodiversity, historic environment and landscape.

The Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Steering Group

The Haven Gateway Green Infrastructure Strategy is supported by a Steering Group of partners comprising local authorities, government agencies, the local wildlife trusts, and Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit. Suffolk County Council has acted as the lead authority for this project on behalf of the Haven Gateway Partnership. The Steering Group is accountable to the Planning Officers Group of the Haven Gateway Partnership.

The green infrastructure resource

The strategy identifies the resources that define or give character to the existing green infrastructure. In doing so it also provides the building blocks for identifying the opportunities for enhancement. The following resources were identified and mapped using a geographical information system.

River patterns, estuaries, reservoirs and topography including flood risk

- Landscape character
- Designated wildlife sites and landscapes and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats
- Agricultural land classification
- Historic landscapes
- Designated historic features
- Promoted access routes
- Key built-up areas and growth potential
- Existing accessible natural greenspace

Accessible natural greenspace

Accessible natural greenspace (ANG) provides opportunities for informal recreation in a natural setting, therefore giving people the opportunity to experience wildlife close to where they live. This is important for quality of life, healthy living and sense of place. Natural England believes that the provision of natural areas should be part of a balanced policy of greenspace provision.

The strategy appraises and identifies standards for delivering enhancements to the existing ANG network. The criteria for defining ANG were developed in liaison with the Steering Group. The existing ANG provision was appraised to identify deficiencies in provision based on four accessible natural greenspace standards (as developed by English Nature [now Natural England] in 2003, adapted by the Town and Country Planning Association and agreed by the Steering Group).

- 2ha+ of ANG within 300m of home – the Neighbourhood Level
- 20ha+ of ANG within 1.2km of home – the District Level
- 60ha+ of ANG within 3.2km of home – the Sub-regional Level
- 500ha+ of ANG within 10km of home – the Regional Level

The deficiencies were appraised to see where they corresponded to areas of population density and anticipated economic and spatial growth.

Opportunities

Consultation was carried out with the Stakeholder Group to identify and analyse the resource data and to determine indicative project opportunities. The Opportunities Map identifies seven types of opportunity for accessible and non-accessible green infrastructure:

- potential green corridor projects with access
- potential green corridor projects without access
- potential river corridor projects
- potential access projects
- potential site projects
- potential green bridges – these include so-called 'living' bridges and non-vehicular bridges that provide links e.g. over water for access projects
- potential area-based initiatives

The Opportunities Map identifies opportunities and indicative vision projects across the Haven Gateway area. A series of map inserts highlight the project opportunities in the main growth nodes at Ipswich, Colchester, Felixstowe/Harwich and Clacton. The schedule of projects identifies the current lead organisation, the indicative cost of the project, and its priority as judged against criteria related to the over-arching principles and the benefits of green infrastructure to the sub-region.

The Concept Map identifies key existing assets such as ANG, rivers, promoted walks and cycleways, and key strategic opportunities:

- key areas for ANG creation at the Regional, Sub-regional and District Levels
- key potential access routes

Steps to delivery and further actions

The strategy represents the first step in delivering a high quality green infrastructure in the Haven Gateway. Success in delivery will depend on how the strategy is taken forward over the next few years. This includes promoting the strategy to key stakeholders and the community by a variety of methods; developing 'best practice' examples of green infrastructure to raise standards and expectations, and developing a governance model and a funding strategy. It also involves ensuring links, including Public Rights of Way (PRoW), to ANG are in place or developed in line with the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and using the planning system to embed the green infrastructure principles in Local Development Frameworks and promoting and enforcing key tools for delivery.

Holbrook Creek, Suffolk County Council

