

Sussex Green Space Project

Assessing the benefits and potential of parks for nature & people: a guide



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“During the first Covid lockdown in Spring 2020, people visited parks more often, and at a time when communities were under stress, parks provided a lifeline and a breathing space” (Parks for People 2021)

Photo: K Ryland

A note on definitions

This document refers to **parks** and **green spaces** and is applicable to spaces which fall into both definitions - as used in the 2019 'Spaces to Thrive' report prepared by Heritage Lottery Fund and others (Dobson et al 2019).

Parks: A public park is an existing designed urban or rural park, the main purpose of which is providing free access to informal recreation and enjoyment. Our definition includes urban parks, country parks, gardens, squares and seaside promenade gardens'.

Green spaces: these are publicly accessible vegetated land connected to built up areas that may vary in size, vegetation cover, species richness, environmental quality, proximity to public transport, facilities and services. Examples of the variety of urban green spaces include formal parks, commons, roadside verges, allotments, cemeteries, street trees, sporting fields, nature conservation areas etc.

Across Sussex, parks and green spaces of all types exist - and also include coastal areas of foreshore and beach and 'SANGS' (Sustainable Alternative Natural Green Spaces). They are managed for a variety of reasons and by different tiers of local government (predominantly by district, town and parish councils).



Photo: K Ryland

About this guide

During the Covid pandemic, it became clear that the use and appreciation of our parks and green spaces significantly increased as their role in our health and wellbeing was "re-discovered" (Parks for People, 2021). The climate and biodiversity emergencies have also flagged the need to support nature's recovery on our doorstep and do what we can to mitigate and adapt to climate change in our towns and cities. Parks and green spaces are thus increasingly being viewed as important natural, social and community 'assets' with a role to play across a range of public policy priorities such as environment, climate change public health, social care, infrastructure and economic development (Parks for People, 2021). For park managers and budget holders within local government, there is a need to better understand how to manage and invest in these spaces to help protect and in many cases fulfil this 'wider' potential and deliver more for society from our parks than before.

This guide has been developed for those managing parks and green spaces and responsible for the budgets and decision-making within local government. It sets out simple steps for better understanding the benefits that these spaces provide for people and nature and for gathering ideas for positive change. It does not provide all the answers but will signpost to other resources that can be used to further investigate the potential of these spaces and plan the interventions that can help to fulfil this.

The method it sets out can be applied to individual parks to help guide future management- or across all parks in an area to understand how they compare with each other and work collectively to deliver a range of benefits to nature and people. Used strategically in this way, it can help to identify where and how resources and time could be best spent to deliver specific benefits of interest.

This guide has been created as part of the Sussex Green Space Project run by Sussex Nature Partnership and funded by South Downs National Park Authority and East Sussex County Council Public Health department. It has been based on a set of case-studies carried out for 7 green spaces across Adur and Worthing Councils (West Sussex) and Wealden District (East Sussex). More information about these case studies and the project can be found on the Sussex Nature Partnership Website ([here](#)).

Parks for nature & people: a 'natural capital' approach?

The Sussex Green Spaces Project set out to 'test' whether a natural capital approach could be used to better understand the value of parks and green spaces for people and nature.

Natural capital has evolved as an approach for identifying and quantifying the various goods, benefits and services that people receive from nature. It can be used to place a value on these benefits, but in Sussex it has been used by [Sussex Nature Partnership](#) in a more general sense to better appreciate what nature 'does for us' and to identify how to enhance, expand and create nature in order to increase the benefits for nature, people and the wider environment.

The Sussex Green Space Project confirmed that whilst a rigid application of a natural capital approach to parks and green spaces is very difficult given their small size and the lack of detailed information as to exactly how the habitats and natural features of these spaces deliver benefits (and in what quantity), it is still a helpful way in which to think about the natural and human 'assets' that make up these sorts of spaces and how these interact to deliver benefits for people and nature.

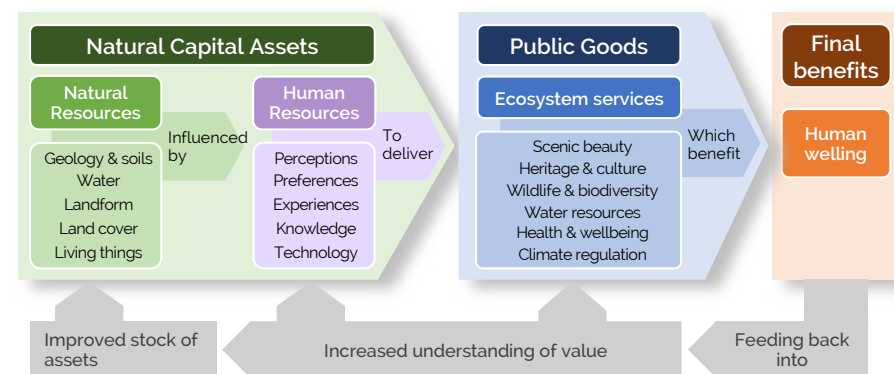
But its findings also confirmed that in the case of parks and green spaces, which have a very specific function as 'public spaces' - a natural capital approach must be supplemented by a 'people-focused' approach: active engagement with those who use these spaces to understand precisely how they are valued by people and to identify what sorts of changes they perceive would help to shape and improve these spaces as community and social assets.

This guide therefore brings together a blend of approach and ideas, broadly based on natural capital thinking, to provide park managers with some pointers as to how to better understand these spaces for nature and people based on the skills and information they have to hand.

The Concept of Natural Capital

Natural capital is defined as the parts of the natural environment that produce value to people (UK Natural Capital Committee). Similar to concepts such as human and financial 'capital', it uses the term 'assets' to identify the various elements of the natural environment that provide us with services, goods and benefits. Habitats, such as woodland, grassland, open water, are examples of such natural capital assets which not only support wildlife but also provide benefits such as biodiversity, food, fibre, clean air, carbon storage and so on. But in places like parks and green spaces, these natural elements also interact with and are influenced by human resources - to deliver and shape benefits for people. These may include trails, paths, facilities for access, sports pitches (tangible assets) but also more intangible human inputs such as interpretation, education, community garden projects, local knowledge, guided walks and so on - which help people to engage with and benefit from their surroundings.

Work done for the New Forest National Park (see below) captures this idea very well and has been used here as a helpful way to think about natural capital in park and green space settings.



Adapted by Rural Focus from ONS (2017). Principles of Natural Capital Accounting

"The natural capital assets that we value are a combination of both natural and human resources (the latter being essential to provide natural resources with their use and significance to society). In the jargon, the **stock** of natural capital assets provides a **flow** of goods and services that give **value** to people. This pathway, which includes an important positive feedback is shown in the figure above".

The characteristics of parks and green spaces, suggest two broad types of natural capital assets that work together to deliver benefits for nature and people in these spaces:

- **Natural assets** (such as habitats and natural features);
- **Human Assets** (which can be built/tangible assets - and cultural, more intangible assets).

More details on how to identify these and examples to look for are provided in the sections below.

Benefits delivered by these assets will be many and often difficult to fully describe or assess. The huge list of ‘ecosystem services and benefits’ identified during a natural capital assessment exercise for green infrastructure (including parks and green spaces) in urban areas in Northern Ireland shown opposite illustrates this (Natural Capital Solutions, 2018).

However, to reduce complexity within this guide - the main benefits that parks and green spaces deliver can be grouped under four main headings which relate to ‘what or who benefits’: **nature; the quality of the local environment; people (park users); and the local community, culture and economy.** A more detailed explanation of each of these categories is provided in Box 1 below.

Natural capital of greenspaces	
Natural Assets	Human Assets
Habitats and natural features	Built and cultural assets

Benefits delivered by assets
Nature
People (park users)
Quality of local environment
Local community, culture and economy

Ecosystem services	
Regulating services	
Reducing rate and volume of storm water runoff	Providing shade
Reducing flood risk	Reducing summer air temperatures and the urban heat island effect
Enhancing infiltration and recharging ground water	Providing shelter from wind
Reducing soil erosion	Reducing energy use
Trapping sediment	Reducing glare
Enhancing water quality	Attenuating noise
Absorbing air pollution – particulate matter (PM), NO _x , SO ₃ , ozone, carbon monoxide, ammonia	Screening unattractive or noisy places
Removing dust and odour	Supporting pollinators
Producing oxygen	Enhancing pest and disease control
Sequestering and storing carbon – in plants and in soil	
Cultural services	
Providing and enhancing landscape character	Enhancing community cohesion
Contributing to sense of place and identity	Reducing aggression, violence and crime rates
Part of cultural heritage	Increasing security
Enhancing aesthetics	Enhancing driver and pedestrian safety
Benefiting physical health – reducing blood pressure, stress, asthma	Reducing road traffic speeds
Speeding recovery from surgery and illness	Enhancing privacy
Enhancing attention and cognitive function	Bringing people closer to nature
Improving mental health and well-being	Providing setting for outdoor learning
Improving pregnancy and birth outcomes	Improving educational outcomes through improvements in concentration and performance and reduced time off for illness
Reducing mortality rates – especially related to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases	Enhancing quality of life
Encouraging physical activity	Providing spiritual value and meaning
Enhancing connectivity	Supporting biodiversity and wildlife viewing
Provisioning services	
Source of timber, fuel, fodder, and fibre	Source of biofuels
Location and source of food production	Location for solar, wind and hydro energy
Enhancing water supply	Source of ornamental resources and crafts
Ecological benefits	
Habitat provision, improvement & connectivity	
Economic benefits	
Increasing land and property prices	Increasing property taxes
Reducing ‘time on market’ for selling property	Enhancing rental income
Attracting business and customers	Increasing tourism and visitor revenues
Reducing health care costs	Reducing screening costs especially next to main roads
Reducing expenditure on air pollution removal	Reducing agricultural costs and enhancing farmer income
Reducing expenditure on storm water infrastructure	Providing potential for carbon offsetting trade
Reducing expenditure on flood defences	Generating income from sales of food, fibre, biofuels and ornamental / craft produce
Saving investment in new power supplies	Creating jobs and employment in environmental sector
Generating income from renewable energy	
Reducing heating and cooling costs	

Box 1: Benefits provided by natural capital in parks and green spaces

Nature: urban parks and green spaces support biodiversity and may provide important refuges for wildlife. They can also work, along with other parks, green corridors and gardens in the area, as a 'network' - supporting wildlife and biodiversity across a wider area. But they often underperform as habitat due to management practices, a lack of 'space for nature' provided within their boundaries and poor connection to surrounding natural spaces.

People (park users): Human assets (built and cultural elements) in green spaces provide benefits for those who visit or use these spaces. Visitor facilities, access paths and trails, interpretation, presence of clubs or activities and opportunities for volunteering are all examples of the built and cultural assets which enable people to access benefits from the space. The benefits include opportunities for recreation, education and social interaction which in turn directly benefit health, wellbeing, sense of community and so on. But the combination with natural assets is also important - together providing more general benefits to users through connection to nature, aesthetic quality, sense of place, tranquility and so on. Increasing the value of a green space for those who use it will require looking across both natural and human assets to understand how these work together and where and how there may be opportunities to deliver added benefit.

Quality of the local environment: The natural capital in parks and green spaces can play a role in improving the local environment. For example, trees and hedges can help to reduce air and noise pollution if located along busy roads. Trees and hedges also store and remove carbon from the atmosphere while semi-natural grassland and wetland also lock up more carbon in their soil and sediment than is realised. Larger areas of grass and porous surfaces in parks can play a role in slowing the flow of water in times of high rainfall. Most parks and green spaces are, however, usually small in scale and so these positive influences on the local environment should not be overstated. But they are still important and in many cases improvements to the natural capital in these spaces can increase these benefits to some degree.

Community, culture and economy: Parks and green spaces can also make positive contributions to the local community, culture and economy. For example, they provide opportunities for commercial activity and events, enhance social cohesion and provide spaces for celebration, tradition, music and art. They can provide a strong sense of place either internally or as part of a wider townscape. The social and economic context of a green space may increase its relative value to local people given that those in more deprived areas of this country have disproportionately less access to green spaces and yet if present, these spaces can provide vital benefits for health, wellbeing and social cohesion.



Photo: K Ryland

Other information

For more information on the benefits of parks and green spaces for people, **Space to Thrive** provides a summary of the evidence from over 490 studies of the benefits of parks and green spaces for people and communities and was commissioned by Heritage Lottery Fund and others to inform its understanding of the importance of these spaces for people. <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/insight/research/space-thrive>

The **Health Parks Toolkit**, which was trialled on parks in East Sussex as part of the Sussex Green Space Project can help to develop an understanding of parks as 'health assets' and guide the creation of strategies to enhance health and wellbeing benefits they deliver. <https://www.healthparks.co.uk/about-health-parks>

Initial assessment of your park or green space: steps to follow

Steps in the process

This assessment can be carried out by park and green space managers but could also be done by a 'friends' group or interested local people.

It does not require specialist knowledge or access to documents and is designed to capture what is known by those who manage the park. But if ecological assessments or engagement exercises with user groups have been carried out, these will be useful.

The aim is to create an initial understanding of why the park is important for nature and people, how it is valued and how it could better fulfil its potential.

Once this is done you can then reflect on what you have learned and map out next steps. This could include working through ideas through to create a management plan for the park or new proposals for funding. But if little is known about the park and the views of its users, it may indicate the need for additional research.

There are 4 proposed steps in the process:

- 1. Understand the place: its characteristics, setting and how it is used and managed**
- 2. Identify the natural capital assets present in the park**
- 3. Identify the benefits it provides for nature and people - and potential for change**
- 4. Reflect on the assessment with management team and discuss next steps**

1. Understand the place: setting, use and management

2. Identify its natural capital assets

3. Identify the **benefits** for nature and people - and the potential for change

4. Reflect, discuss and plan **next steps**

1. Understand the place: setting, use and management

Photo: Resources4Change



Step 1: Understand the place: its characteristics, setting and how it is managed and used

The purpose of this step is to collate basic information to provide a basic understanding of the place: an overview of the park or green space, its ownership, setting and how it is currently managed and used by visitors and local community. It is also important to capture information on any constraints or barriers to change, any threats to the park or green space and any formal aspirations for change. The purpose is to provide context for the steps to come next.

This can be done using existing knowledge of the park and a little research or discussion with park managers if some information is not known. Staff knowledge of user groups, behaviours and times and types of use can help to build up a more detailed picture. An initial walk around the park can also help to provide a rough sense of users, types of use and proximity to local community.

A set of checklists has been developed to assist with this - see below.

➤ A prototype online/app based form and 'autogenerated' report have been developed to accompany this guide. Contact SxNP for more information

Background information and location	Complete for the park
Name	
Type of Greenspace	e.g. park, public garden, sports ground, playing field, SANG, village green, foreshore, burial ground etc.
Size and area (if known)	
Location	e.g. urban, urban fringe, rural, coastal
Ownership	e.g. district, town council, parish council, local community etc
Special designations or protections	e.g. local wildlife site, conservation area, Green flag etc
Notable features adjacent to or near the park	Roads, housing, railway, habitats, farmland open water, protected wildlife site etc

Existing management, constraints & aspirations	Complete for the park	
General site condition and appearance		
Any management activities of note		
Constraints to or opportunities for change to management		
Any formal aspirations for the site		
Funding and resources		
Level of support from councillors, local community etc		
Any volunteer groups or involvement with local NGOs		

Local community information	Complete for the park	
Any specific local community use of the site		
Local socio economic conditions		
How is the greenspace connected to the local community?		
Does it connect to any other green spaces in the area?		
Is there a neighbourhood plan for the area?	If yes - does it reference this park or greenspace?	
Are there any other local aspirations for the site?		

Visitors, users and related information	Complete for the park	
Main users of the site	e.g. local community, visitors from wider area, tourists, Not known	
Further information about visitors and where they come from		
Reasons for visit	e.g. exercise and recreation (formal), exercise and recreation (informal), spending time outdoors, dog walking, spending time with friends and family, play, attending events, visiting attractions etc	
Level of use	From very well used - through to not used (scale 1-5)	
How do visitors access the park or greenspace?	e.g. car on foot, public transport, bicycle	
Number of access points		
Is there interpretation on the site? If so - provide details.	Yes/ no	
Are there any social issues related to the site? Or tensions between user groups?		
Has there been any formal engagement with users in recent times?	Yes/no. If yes - provide details.	

2. Identify natural capital assets

Step 2. Identify natural capital assets

The purpose of this step is to identify the natural capital assets found in the park. These will be a combination of **natural assets** and **human (built/cultural) assets**.

Walk around the park or green space on your own or with the management team, 'Friends' group or other interested stakeholders and record assets present, using the checklists shown here as a guide. Take other notes on observations you may make about their condition, how they are used etc.

Start by identifying **natural assets**: these include the **habitats** present (which may be semi-natural or more urban in their characteristics) and any **features** in the park that may support wildlife (e.g. built structures such as old walls/brickwork which may support lichens, mosses and invertebrates and features specifically created in the park to support nature such as log piles, bird boxes and so on). Important **indicators** are also included in the checklist. These indicators will provide information about the quality of the place for nature, connection to nature and level of connectivity to surrounding habitats.

It is also important to note any 'detractors' or negative factors or features that may be present that could reduce benefits for nature. Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) are just one example which should be identified and investigated in case they need to be removed or controlled. Other examples include litter, pollution, visitor pressure or other factors creating a negative impact on the natural environment of the space.

Natural		
Habitats	Features	
<i>Semi Natural Habitats</i>		
Woodland/trees	Bare Ground	
Scrub	Brick/stone walls	
Hedges	Rocks, rockery or stonework	
Grassland (tussocky)	Gravel paths	
Tall Herb	Dead wood	
Mosaic vegetation	Log/twig pile(s)	
Wetland	Compost heaps	
Stream/Ditch	Wooden posts/rails	
Pond/Lake	Wildflowers	
Coastal habitats	Flagship or rare species	
Marine area	Gravestones	
<i>Urban Habitats</i>		
Flower beds	Bat Boxes	
Annual Bedding	Bird Boxes	
Ornamental Shrubbery	Old walls with soft mortar	
Specimen and veteran trees	Sustainable Urban Drainage features	
Amenity Grassland	Green Roof(s)	
Long/unmown grassland	Natural boundary features	
Open Water	Timber groynes	
Hedging (non-native)	Buildings (that may provide roosting sites for birds/bats)	
Herbaceous perennials	Community garden/ vegetable growing areas	
Native Planting		
Indicators of value to wildlife and/or local environment*		
Species diversity (High/Medium/Low)		
Visibility of wildlife/wildflowers (Yes/No)		
Structural complexity of vegetation (High/Low)		
Ratio of vegetation to bare soil and concrete/tarmac (High/Low)		
Ratio of ecological area to amenity area (High/Low)		
Habitats in the immediate surroundings of the park/green space (including gardens) (Yes/No)		
Detractors (negative factors) present		
Presence of INNS* (negative factor) (Yes/No)		

The next step is to identify the **human assets** which help to deliver benefits for people in the park or green space.

Using the checklist opposite, first identify the access and built infrastructure which is present in the park or green space. It will also be worth reflecting on its condition and how well used it is (and by which user groups).

Human assets also include **cultural assets and resources** which may be present in or are provided for the space. These include the governance factors that help to guide its management, the use of the space for traditions or customs, the involvement of local people and opportunities for volunteering. But it also includes less tangible factors such as sensory or aesthetic experiences it provides, scenic view and opportunities for connection to nature.

Certain **indicators** of value of the space to people will also be important to identify - such as level of tranquility, how accessible it is (e.g. number of points of access) and whether specific audits or plans have been produced to enhance its value for health and wellbeing.

Again, note any **'detractors'** - factors or features which may be having a negative effect on the value of the park or green space for people (or specific groups of people). Include any incompatibility between users or types of activity that take place in the space.

Human	
Access/built	Cultural
Open access land and/or routes	Governance factors
Visitor infrastructure	- Designation (village green, conservation area, local wildlife site etc)
- Parking	- Management plan
- Café/kiosk	- Friend's Group or other liaison groups/committees
- Play area(s)	- Specific grant funding or funded projects
- Outdoor gym	- Other
- Paths/trails	Traditions/customs
- Paths accessible to all	- Regular events
Toilets	- Long standing uses/clubs
- Bins	- Memorial areas or events
- Seating	- Celebration events/uses
- Covered/group meeting areas	- Others
- Playing Fields and formal sports facilities	Local skills and knowledge used
- Club/clubhouse/changing facilities	- Citizen science
- Other buildings of interest	- Work groups
- Heritage features (e.g. historic garden, buildings)	- Engagement with park planning and management
- Interpretation	- Other
Notice board (park or community information)	Sensory elements and perceptions (landscape, aesthetic, connection to nature)
Educational facilities or resources	- High quality aesthetic experience
Others?	- Views
	- Opportunities for connection to nature
	- Other
	Opportunities for volunteering
Important indicators of value for people	
Level of tranquillity (low/med/high)	
Number of access points	
A 'health audit' or plan is in place (identifying its benefit for health and its setting out plans for improvement) (Yes/No)	
Detractors (negative factors present)	

3. Identify the **benefits** for nature and people - and the potential for change

Step 3: Identify the benefits for nature and people - and the potential for change

The next step is to develop an understanding of how the natural capital assets provide benefits for nature and people - and to start to generate ideas for change which will enhance this.

This can be done in a number of stages:

- Identify how the natural capital assets of the park support nature and think about where and how this could be improved.
- Identify how the park or green space plays a role in supporting the quality of the local environment and whether this can be enhanced through creation or improvement of natural capital assets.
- Engage with users of the park or green space and the local community, to find out how the space is valued and what types of benefits it provides for users and local people. Start a conversation about ideas for future change to enhance the space for both nature and people.

Suggestions for how to approach this are set out below.

Note: for many parks, there may not be enough information available to complete all steps in this process. But it is worth working through it anyway as a means of flagging gaps in knowledge and identifying areas for future investigation.



Photos: Resources4Change

Benefits for nature

The purpose of this step is to identify how the natural capital assets present in the park currently support nature and to start to think about how this could be improved in future.

Suggested steps include the following:

- Create a sketch map of the location and extent of any habitats or natural features present - and annotate this with notes about current management, any particular 'ecological interest' you are aware of and any potential for improvement or change.
- Use the pro forma shown below to help to identify the condition and any key characteristics of habitats and features present that add to their value for wildlife. Can you estimate whether its current condition poor, moderate or good? Is there potential to improve this - and how might that be done?
- Note any species present (using resources noted below) - particularly those that are rare or considered 'flag ship' species (well known/high profile species). It is also important to note the presence of any invasive species and whether these require control.
- Reflect on its setting - is the surrounding area rich in wildlife (is the park part of a wider network of habitats which are connected to each other) or is the park/green space very disconnected from other wildlife rich areas and is therefore acting as an isolated refuge?
- Note any ideas you have about whether action is needed to protect habitats or features that you know are of value for nature - and whether there may be opportunities to enhance their quality or expand their area through new habitat creation. Are there areas of the park or green space of less ecological value which might be appropriate for new habitat creation? Are there any features that could be added to support biodiversity in the park, such as bird or bat boxes? Add notes to your sketch map to capture these thoughts.
- Finally - does the park or green space support important ecosystem services like pollination? Pollination will be supported where there is continuity of flowering plants from spring to autumn. Do you encourage natural pest control in your management practices?

Resources you can draw on to help with this step:

- Ecological expertise on your staff team
- A previous ecological survey of the park
- Ecological records for the park or green space will also be useful in identifying any species of interest that have been recorded in the park. Where available, these can be obtained for the site and a radius around it from Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre <https://sxbrc.org.uk/home/>
- Local sightings of species, other 'citizen science' projects or expertise within the local community, Friends group, schools etc.



3 key types of action:

PROTECT: does specific action need to be taken to ensure the habitat or feature is not damaged?

ENHANCE: could the value of the habitat or feature for wildlife be improved by changing its management?

EXPAND: is there potential to expand the area or quantity of the habitats or features in the park or create new areas for wildlife or to improve connection between existing patches of habitat?

Also, see the resources section at the end of this guide for links to useful documents that relate to increasing the value of parks and green spaces for biodiversity which will provide ideas for useful actions to take.

CONDITION/QUALITY OF SITE HABITATS & FEATURES

Habitats and Broad Features	Circle all that apply and add detail where possible (use separate sheets if needed for notes)					
Woodland & trees	Broadleaved, mixed or coniferous	Diverse structure or uniform	Active management	Ancient, secondary or plantation	Mature and veteran trees	Retained deadwood habitats
Scrub and hedges	Mostly native species or non-native	Dense or gappy	Good connectivity	Approximate length		
Grassland	Short amenity lawn	Short but wildflowers visible	Varied sward heights	Areas of tall grassland retained	Species-rich grassland of high interest	Tussocky grassland
Open water	Good water quality or polluted/eutrophic	Varied water depths, shallow margins or steep sided	Waterside vegetation (native or non-native)	Undisturbed areas for aquatic wildlife		
Coastal	Connectivity to other coastal habitats	Space for dynamic movement and development of coastal species	Level of disturbance	Cover of vegetation (%)		
Flower borders	Spring to autumn continuity of adult pollinator food sources	Annual bedding with bare ground	Perennial plantings	Nectar and pollen-rich plantings or less useful cultivars	Uniform heights or structurally varied planting	Use of peat-based material or not
Vegetation (overall condition)	Extent of permanent vegetation cover (%)	Presence of food plants for pollinators (larvae and adults)	Overwintering habitat for pollinators	Diverse/complex vegetation structure	Connectivity of ecologically valuable habitats	
Species composition	Presence of INNS and naturalness of assemblage	Plant species diversity	Naturalness of biological assemblages (semi-natural habitats)			
Cultural quality	Visibility of wildlife/wildflowers	Presence of flagship or rare species	Size of "environmental" space vs amenity areas	Type and length of boundary features	Level of tranquility	Accessible paths



Photo: K Ryland

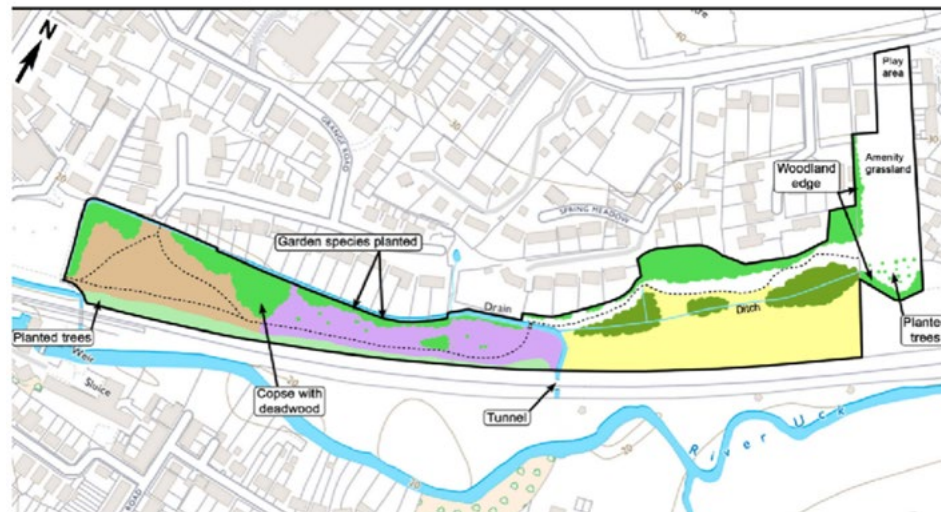


Photo: K Ryland



Photo: Resources4Change

Hempstead Meadows LNR Habitats & Features



Benefits for the local environment

“Urban natural land and green space provides society with many services including protecting urban properties from noise pollution and cooling cities by more than half a degree Celcius” UK Natural Capital Accounts for Urban Areas

A natural capital approach provides a way of thinking about the additional and wider benefits parks and green spaces provide for the local environment. Many of these come from what are termed ‘ecosystem services’ (see illustration opposite).

The Sussex Green Space Project looked at literature on the ecosystem services and benefits from ‘urban’ environments, habitats and green infrastructure and concluded that of the long list of possible ecosystem services these spaces may provide to the local environment (see page 5 above) - **FIVE** stand out as the most important/ influential in an urban setting (POST 2017) and are relatively easy to identify and communicate to users and local people. These are:

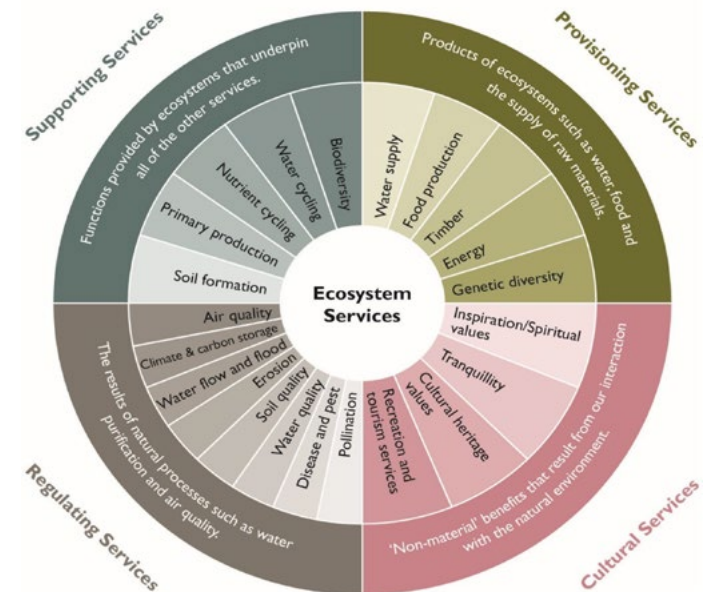
- Air quality and noise regulation
- Water quality regulation
- Local Flood regulation
- Urban cooling and shading
- Carbon storage

The table below provides a very simplified explanation on how particular natural capital assets play a role in delivering these benefits and should help you to identify whether they are **likely to be provided** or are **possibly provided** by your park or green space. This can be used to start to think about whether it may be beneficial to manage the park to protect or enhance specific ecosystem services and how that might be done.

A word of warning. This is **a very simplistic approach**. Truly understanding how natural capital assets actually work together as a ‘system’ in delivering ecosystem services and benefits is an emerging science and many factors play a role, particularly in urban areas where natural capital assets tend to be small in size and often quite degraded in condition and ecological function. Expert assessment will be required to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

When thinking about whether a park or green space is delivering the ecosystem services listed, it is important to note several factors:

1. The **area of habitat present** (the larger the area, the more ecosystem services it is likely to provide). This is why parks and green spaces, unless quite large, may deliver only small benefits to the local environment as they are simply not present at a scale that can deliver a large impact.
2. **Ecological condition**. The better the ecological condition of a habitat the better it will function across a whole range of areas (and therefore the more effective it will be at providing ecosystem services and benefits).
3. **Where it is located**. For example, to provide reduction in air quality or noise pollution, a natural capital asset such as a piece of woodland will need to be located close to the source of pollution or between the source and those experiencing the pollution). A park or green space may be particularly important in absorbing surface water runoff in an area where surface water flooding is a particular problem.
4. It’s **proximity or ‘connection’** to wider habitats and areas of natural capital. The influence of a park and green space for biodiversity or other environmental impacts will be amplified if it is connected to other green areas around it - or forms part of a wider network of green spaces.



Ecosystem Services provided by natural capital (South Downs National Park Authority).

Overview of role of parks and green spaces in providing benefits for the local environment

Natural capital benefits: Quality of local environment	
Air quality and noise regulation	<p>Air quality: Evidence suggests that habitats such as woodland, trees, hedges, wetland and open water - but particularly trees - can help to absorb certain air pollutants from the local area. Therefore, this benefit may be being provided if there is a good area of these sorts of habitat types present in the park. The importance of the park for this benefit may be particularly high in areas where local air quality is a problem. The bigger the park/ greater area of semi-natural habitats such as trees - the greater benefit will be delivered.</p> <p>Noise pollution: a park may act as a noise barrier if it is located between people (houses, schools etc) and a source of noise, such as a busy road. Thus, the location of the park is important. Also, if the park has natural boundary features such as rows of trees of hedges, earth mounds/banks or green walls these will probably help to reduce noise travelling across the park (but also into the park - thus helping to increase the level of tranquillity inside the park)</p>
Water quality regulation	<p>The presence of certain habitat types (particularly wetland, semi-natural grassland, woodland) or Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) will slow the flow of water before it reaches water courses and in so doing, this will help to remove certain urban pollutants before these enter water courses. They can also reduce the amount of surface water entering the combined sewage system (see below) hence reducing the likelihood of subsequent discharges of untreated sewage into water courses during heavy rainstorms (POST, 2017).</p>
Flood Regulation	<p>Parks may provide a local benefit in relation to flood regulation if they contain large areas of permeable surfaces - which allow rain water to percolate into the soil below. Hence the indicator % ratio of vegetation to bare soil and concrete/tarmac is important. The higher this ratio - the more permeable surfaces the park will provide (and hence flood regulation benefit).</p> <p>SuDS, if present in a park or green space, will also provide natural drainage processes through a network of above-ground surface water management features such as swales (POST,2017). Other areas of wetland/ open water which can 'store' excess water in times of high rainfall will provide similar benefits.</p> <p>If the park of green space contains a river or stream, this can help to convey or store urban run-off. If these water courses are restored, with associated riparian vegetation and connection to floodplains, this will increase their benefit via increased water infiltration and improved water quality.</p>
Urban Cooling and Shading	<p>Urban areas are often much warmer than surrounding rural areas as they have extensive heat absorbing surfaces such as concrete/tarmac. Parks and green spaces can help to lower temperatures through evaporation from vegetation, shading and modifying wind flow. However, effectiveness in this function depends on the configuration, size and type of green space and habitats present and can be quite complex to understand. The general principle though probably holds - that the bigger the park and larger the amount of vegetation - the greater the cooling/shading function it will provide.</p>
Carbon Storage	<p>Although the contribution of urban green spaces to overall carbon storage is limited compared to larger and more rural habitat types, they are still important carbon reservoirs.</p> <p>The presence of certain habitat types that perform best in storing and sequestering carbon (actively removing it from the atmosphere) is key: i.e. trees & woodland (particularly important), semi-natural grassland, hedges, wetland and certain coastal habitats (e.g. saltmarsh). Presence of these will indicate an important carbon storage and sequestration function. Removal of these features would not only reduce carbon sequestration across the park or green space but may also lead to the emission of carbon stored.</p> <p>Only a small amount is stored in shrubs and herbaceous borders. The management of mown lawns and flower beds found in many urban parks may also result in more carbon being emitted than stored (POST, 2017).</p>

For information on tools and methodologies that can be used to more fully assess the ecosystem services provided by a place see the Resources section at the end of this guide.



Photo: K Ryland

Benefits for people (users and local community)

The purpose of this step is to increase understanding of who uses the park, why they value it, how the various 'assets' in the park contribute (or detract) from their experience - and how people benefit from their visits. It is also useful at this stage to start to identify its potential - by gathering thoughts from users about what they would like to see change in the place to improve their experience (and hence increase the benefits they get from it).

Depending on the funds and time you have available, this is best carried out through an initial 'social engagement' exercise - which captures why the space is valued but also 'starts a conversation' with those who use the park that can help to engage them in the planning of any future changes that may result.

The Sussex Green Space Project also found that if you have completed an assessment of the nature present in the park and have started to explore ideas for how this can be improved, parks users will be very interested in this type of information and it can help to open conversations about how people value and perceive the park.

The diagram opposite summarises the type of information that can be acquired through a social engagement exercise. It is a three stage process, starting with gathering practical information such as how the space is used, what benefits it provides - and then moving on to what might be described as more 'emotional' information - identifying what people like and don't like. Finally, it can start to get an insight into the sorts of changes that people would like to see in the space. It is important to understand that park users and people local to the space will often have a lot of valuable knowledge and experience. Inviting them to share what they know can be a good way to get a conversation started.

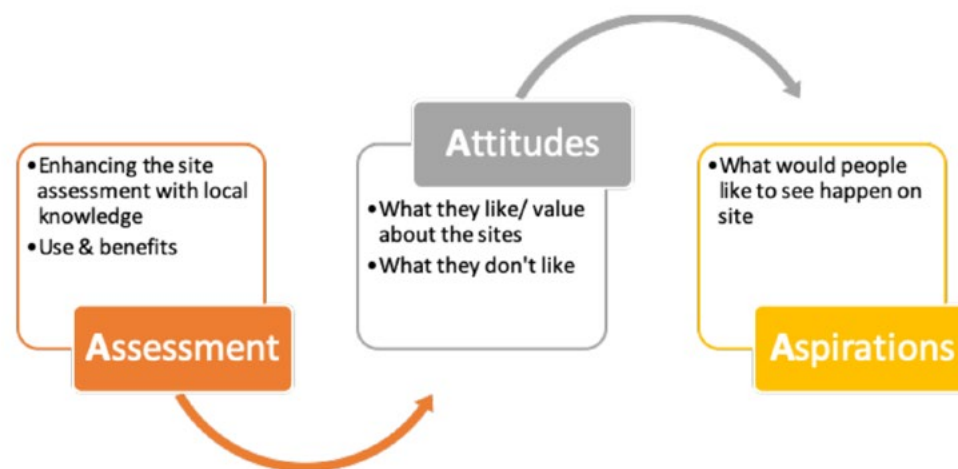
Tips for social engagement

As a first step, you could carry out some social engagement yourself with park users to gather basic information about why people visit the park, why they value it, what changes they would like to see and so on. This could take various forms - see the list of guidance on social engagement overleaf for some ideas.

You could include specific questions about the built/cultural elements of the park, perceptions of the facilities provided, their condition, what benefits they provide, what should be protected, enhanced or provided for users in the park.

Quantitative information on numbers of users could be gathered using traditional people counters or surveys, but there are also innovations taking place using new technology and phone-based apps to collect such information.

If funds are available, and if complex questions need to be understood (such as scoping out ideas for significant change), it may be beneficial to commission some specialist social engagement exercises with users and local people.



Benefits for People: questions to investigate

For park users - does the park or green space provide the types of opportunities or benefits in the tables opposite - and if so, how? Is there potential to improve the space to provide more of these benefits? What do users like about the park or green space - and what do they not like? What ideas do users have for changes to the park?

It is also important to note any 'detractors' which reduce the experience of users in the park and/or any tensions between user groups that may need to be resolved.

Thinking more widely, how do users feel about some of the changes that could be made to the park to support wildlife or its role in storing carbon or improving the quality of the local environment? Are these compatible with the types of uses and values that users currently perceive as appropriate for the space?

For local people and communities - how is the park perceived and valued in the local area? What opportunities does it provide for people to interact, gather or generate income? What changes would they like to see to the park to enhance its value to the local area?

Are there any barriers or tensions to this that should be understood?

"Parks and green spaces are key components of social infrastructure - contributing significantly to how people engage and interact, underpinning a sense of community, belonging and quality of life" (Space to Thrive, 2019)

Types of benefits	Key questions to explore
Access and Recreation Opportunities	What opportunities are provided? Are these for formal/ informal recreation or sport? What facilities are provided? What condition are these in and how are these used? Which are most valued (and why?) Are there any known barriers to access - and which user groups are most affected? Is there potential for more or different provision of access or recreation in this park?
Health and Wellbeing	Beyond the access and recreation opportunities - are there specific opportunities provided by this space which support health and wellbeing? Is it used specifically by people for health benefits? Has the space been planned with both mental and physical health benefits in mind? Can all ages and abilities benefit from what it has to offer? See the resources section below for more information on 'Health Audits' for parks - which provides information on this element and the key things to think about.
Sense of Place/ belonging	Does the space have a unique sense of place that should be protected or enhanced? Can this be described? What natural or human assets contribute to this?
Connection to nature	Does the park or green space provide opportunities for people to connect to and spent time in nature? What assets assist with this? How could this be enhanced in the future?
Learning and Education	Is the park or green space used for learning or education? Is this informal or formal (more organised)? How is this facilitated? Could more opportunities be provided?

Types of benefits	Key questions to ask
Opportunities for commercial activity	Does the park provide a space for events, kiosks, stalls, fetes, concerts or other opportunities for local groups to generate income? Is there potential for this type of activity? Are there any tensions to understand?
Social interaction	Does the park provide opportunities or spaces for social interaction, community volunteering groups, community gardens etc. Could more be done to encourage this? Who might be interested in leading these sorts of activities? Are there specific groups for whom there are barriers to engaging? What are these and how could they be overcome?

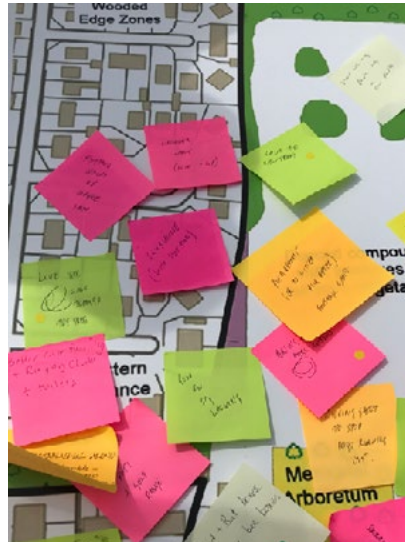
Techniques for social engagement

Set out opposite is a list of community engagement and consultation techniques which have all been used successfully in green space contexts and may be useful.

These techniques range from those that are designed to collect a small amount of information from a large number of people (broad but shallow engagement) to techniques that collect a large amount of information from a smaller number of people (deep but narrow engagement).

Further information these and other tools and techniques can be found in the resources section at the end of this document.

	Technique	Description	Application
Broad but shallow	Instant reaction activity	At events and on sites, for larger numbers or flow of people; for example, Activator boards to tick (Smiley face etc); Ball in a Basket for good/bad/indifferent reactions	Out on site - enables people to provide information in a quick, user friendly way.
	Mobile polls & QR codes	Asking people to use their mobile phone to provide instant feedback	A method to deliver the 'instant reaction' that appeals to a younger audience
	Pop-up consultation stalls	Participative consultation stalls, great for events and community consultation, asking questions about attitudes and perceptions. Using fun techniques such as pin-boards, competitions and comment trees.	Onsite activity. enables people to provide information in a quick, user friendly way. Opens up opportunities for further conversations
	Social media analysis	Using existing data such as reviews on Trip Advisor, analysing feedback on Facebook, Twitter, etc or developing bespoke data collection tools using the functionality of sites such as Facebook.	Ongoing monitoring, especially after changes have been introduced
	Structured observation	Using existing data such as reviews on Trip Advisor, analysing feedback on Facebook, Twitter, etc or developing bespoke data collection tools using the functionality of sites such as Facebook.	A way of collecting spatial data - part of the greenspace that are well used/ less well used etc
Deep but Narrow	Transect walking	A method for reaching beyond the usual suspects, into hard to reach and disengaged parts of the community, again good for finding out about attitudes and perceptions.	A way of collecting spatial data - part of the greenspace that are well used/ less well used etc
	Pictures/drawing/ collage	Using arts and crafts to help people interpret experiences, using project arts activities to show changes in knowledge, perception and involvement. For example, Results Tree illustrating roots, growth and fruits of projects.	More in-depth exploration of experience. attitudes and aspirations. Creates material that can be shared with a wider audience
	Digital Community Mapping	Based around Google Maps and using a range of the above tools, Google Maps can be used to record and share a wide range of information using words, photos and video.	
	Stakeholder Interviews	Structured and semi-structured conversations to inform both formative and summative evaluations.	Good way of capturing information from formal users of the greenspace - sports associations etc



Photos: Resources4Change

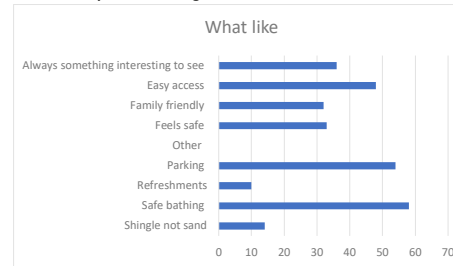
Social Engagement Case Study: Kingston Beach

Sussex Green Space Project carried out a social engagement study with users of Kingston Beach, a green space in Shoreham-on-Sea, West Sussex that is owned and managed by Adur & Worthing Councils.

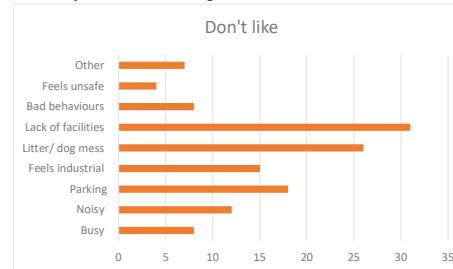
This involved assessing the site (site visit), running an engagement exercise with users on the site followed by a community meeting to discuss the results.

A copy of the final report can be found on the project website - and its headline findings are shown below.

What did they like about Kingston Beach?



What they don't like about Kingston Beach?



Ideas for improving Kingston Beach for Nature

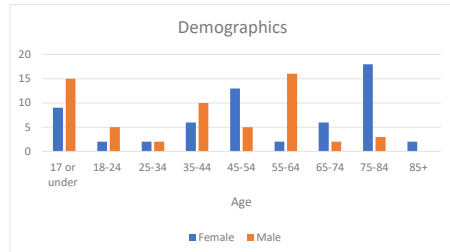
- Increase the number of bins X4
- Make it a plastic free zone x4
- Art installations, interpreting nature & heritage
- Don't change it
- Bee habitats X2
- More wildflowers x3
- Support 'Anglers against litter' who already operate on the beach
- Bushes along the top edge of the beach
- Less concrete, more green X2
- Ban BBQ's x3
- Let nature take its course
- Add Tamarisk trees
- Break up the concrete area, return it to its natural state
- Plant trees, Palms & Hedges
- Don't feed the seals
- Plant a low hedge along the railings, screens the road and reduces noise x2
- Perhaps do not draw much attention to the nature, help to preserve it
- Increase the grass area for wildlife and plants
- Ensure the local development takes account of impact on local environment

Ideas for improving Kingston Beach for people

- Toilets x 9
- Move benches closer to the sea for older visitors
- Make the slipway more useable - too slippery
- Bigger bins and emptied more often x2
- Recycling bins

4. SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

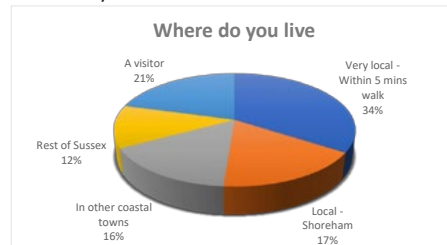
Who was consulted?



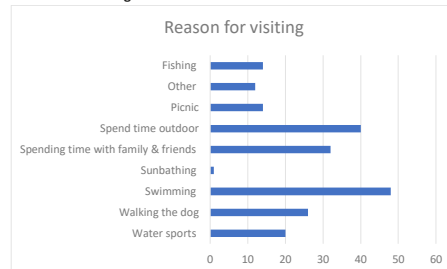
How often to they visit Kingston Beach



Where did they come from?



Reasons for visiting



Café x3

- Lights at night
- Phone chargers
- Somewhere to keep your towels / shoes etc
- Bigger car park but free
- Place for parking bikes
- A boardwalk / walk way all along the beach x2
- More benches
- Changing rooms
- Better management of the car park
- Buoys for the swimmers - give them something to swim around
- Extend a path along the back of the beach x2
- Move the benches onto the concrete, all along the path
- Life Boat station should open a café & toilets.
- Pick up litter
- Lots of concerns about the car park. Gets very busy but don't want to pay
- Planting and screening along the road edge
- Don't charge for parking
- Facilities for cyclists (locking area)
- Improve rowing club facilities, perhaps include public toilets
- Develop the old Custom house with a café & toilets
- Bigger Car Park

Sighting from Kingston Beach

- Dolphins
- Kingfishers
- Foxes
- Rats
- Black headed Gulls

- Herring Gulls
- Little Egret
- Mute Swans
- Common Seal
- Sea Horses
- Jelly fish sp
- Bass
- Mullet (Grey & Thin lipped)
- Gilthead Bream
- Mackerel
- Rock pools by the pier are full of life
- Sea Kale
- Clouded Yellow
- Oysters
- Mussels
- Winkles
- Turnstones
- Oystercatchers
- Peregrine
- Cormorants
- Lions' Mane Jelly fish
- Grey Heron
- Dunlin
- Yellow Horned poppy

Benefits for nature and people: a summary table

A summary table pro forma has been produced as a tool to help summarise what is important about the park or green space - and to start to make links between the natural capital assets it contains and the various benefits it provides. This may be a useful way to start to communicate what is special about the park or to flag any gaps or areas for improvement and could be used as part of a social engagement exercise to help 'start a conversation' with park users about why the space is important and what changes could be beneficial. See the example below which has been completed for Kingston Beach in Shoreham-by-Sea.

A blank copy can be found in the Resources section of this document and a link to a pdf version can be found on the [Sussex Green Space Project webpage](#)

Legend	
Condition of asset	Good*** Moderate ** Poor *
Potential condition	Good *** Moderate ** Poor *
Recommendation	Protect, Enhance and/or Expand
The asset currently delivers benefits on this site ■ The asset possibly delivers benefits on this site (or very small level of benefit) □	

Natural Capital Assets		Condition and Potential				Nature		Quality of local environment					People (users)				Community, culture & economy			
		Asset present/absent	Condition (current)	Condition (potential)	Recommendation	Biodiversity/wildlife	Pollination	Natural pest control	Air quality & noise regulation	Water quality regulation	Flood regulation	Urban cooling & shading	Carbon storage	Sense of Place/belonging	Connection to Nature	Access & Recreation	Health and wellbeing	Learning & Education	Social Interaction	Commercial activity
Habitats																				
Coastal Habitats	Vegetated Shingle	Present	*	**	Protect & Expand	■							□	□						
Grassland	Flowery & Tussocky grassland (bank)	Present	**	***	Protect & Enhance	■	■							□						
	Marine/ open water area with shingle beach	Present	**	**	Protect	■					□		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Natural Features/																				
	Old walls/stone and brickwork	Present	**	**	Protect	■														
	Old Timber Groynes	Present	**	**	Protect	■							■							
Other Indicators of Importance																				
	Continuity of flowering	Present	**	***	Enhance	■	■							■						
	Species diversity	Present	*	***	Enhance	■	■							■				■		
Built Assets																				
Visitor Infrastructure	Car Park	Present	**	**	Protect											■				
	Club/clubhouse																			
	Kiosk [temporary]	Present	**	**	Protect											■			■	■
	Seating	Present	**	***	Protect & Expand											■	■	■		
Heritage features	Historic Lighthouse	present	**	***	Protect & Enhance									■				■		
Cultural																				
Governance	Village Green status	Present	*	***	Protect & Enhance									■						
Traditions/customs	Site of RNLI lifeboat station	Present												■				■	■	
	Safe bathing	Present	**	**	Protect									■	■	■	■		■	
	Fishing mark(s)	Present	**	**	Protect									■	■	■	■			
Sensory elements and perceptions	Valued urban/industrial seascape	Present	**	***	Protect & Enhance									■	■	■	■	■	■	■

An example of this table has been completed for Kingston Beach (opposite), to illustrate how this tool can be used to summarise natural capital assets and benefits provided by a green space. This is a relatively simple site and so if using the pro forma for more complex sites, it will create a larger table with additional assets included.

Benefits for nature and people: statement of significance

An additional exercise that can be very helpful in capturing and describing the special qualities of a park or Greenspace for nature and people - is to draft a 'statement of significance'. This is a practice used by heritage specialists when developing management plans for heritage sites but it can be usefully applied to public spaces like parks or green spaces, where it is also important to understand what makes a place special, why and to whom - before any changes are considered. This will ensure that it's 'essence' can be protected and embedded in any plans for change. Where significance is low, this can also indicate that a place is more of a 'blank slate' and can accommodate more change without endangering what is currently there or reducing its value to users.

There is no specific methodology for preparing such a statement - other than to try to encapsulate in words why a park or green space is important for nature and people. It can draw on an assets/benefits summary table (above) and where possible it should be based on feedback from social engagement around why the park is valued so that it reflects the perceptions and views of those who use the space. It could even be co-developed through a social-engagement exercise. The significance for nature and the local environment should be informed by relevant ecological and environmental expertise if available.

An example 'Statement of Significance' for Kingston Beach in Shoreham-on-Sea is provided overleaf.

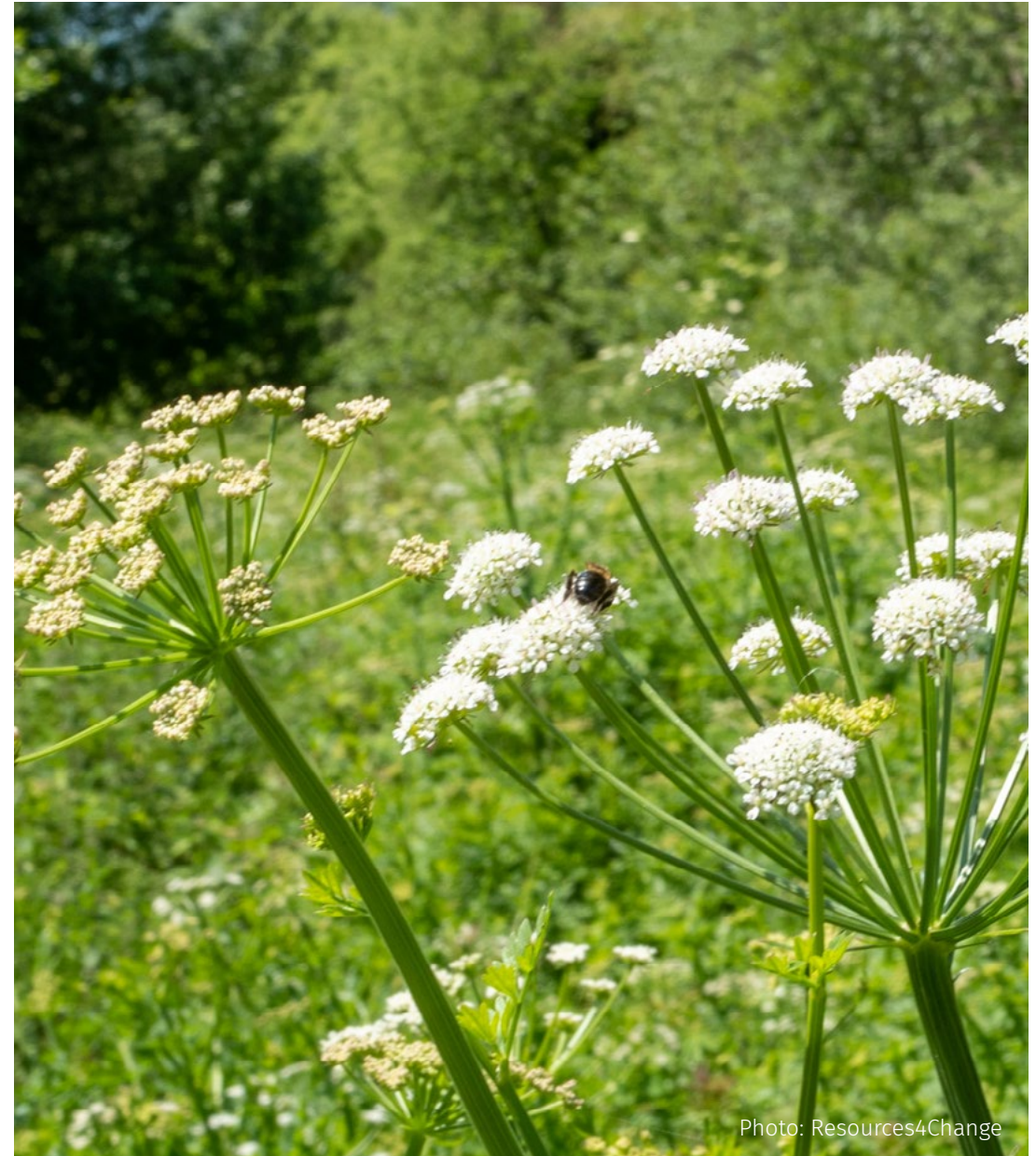


Photo: Resources4Change

Kingston Beach :Statement of Significance

Nature:

Kingston Beach is a site on the northern edge of Shoreham Harbour which has some small and scattered fragments of vegetated shingle. There is some scope to expand the extent of this **Priority Habitat**, for which Sussex is an important location nationally.

Most of the vegetation on the beach is concentrated along a narrow roadside bank and includes a mixture of native plants and those of garden origin. This flower-rich habitat may provide valuable resources for **pollinating insects**.

Some of the physical features at Kingston Beach provide specialised niches that can be useful to different plants and animals. These include bare ground, shingle, old timber, stonework and crumbling mortar.

Bottle-nosed dolphin, Common Seal, many types of seabird and even seahorses have been observed in the harbour from Kingston Beach.

Quality of Local Environment:

The area of natural habitats present on this site is very small and so any additional benefits to the local environment from these is likely to be very small/ negligible. The presence of the shingle beach (within a sheltered harbour) may well protect adjacent areas from the impact of storms and coastal flooding (noting that the site and surrounding area are located in a flood risk area).

The use of the beach by the public could potentially have a detrimental impact on the local environment e.g. increase car use, BBQs and beach fires, antisocial behaviour and litter.

People/users:

Kingston Beach is a popular site for recreation valued by both local people and visitors. It provides opportunity for water sports (of which there has been a considerable increase in recent years), angling, rest and relaxation and social interaction. The site has considerable 'well-being potential, providing access to sea-air, a range of recreational opportunities and access to nature.

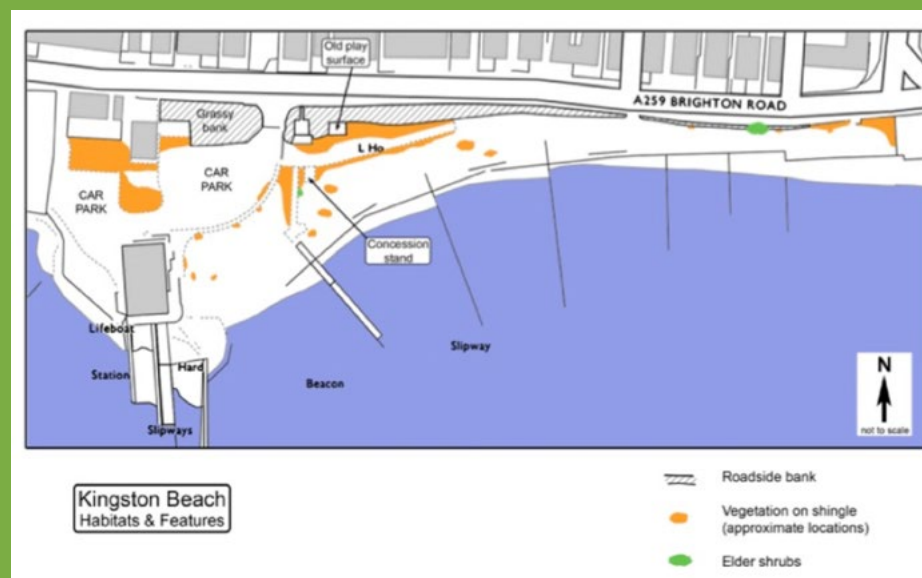
People value easy-access, onsite parking, the informal feel of the place and the interest generated by the shipping, water-based recreation and the wildlife.

Kingston Beach has been described as 'quirky' and this contributes to a strong sense of place and informal community that mean that many people feel passionate about the site.

The beach has become significantly more popular since the Covid pandemic which poses a future challenge of managing increased numbers of visitors whilst maintaining or enhancing the sites natural assets.

Community, Culture and Economy: Kingston Beach is overlooked by a row of approximately 40 houses which are detached from other settlement in the area. From this has developed a strong community feel which includes the beach. There is a Resident's Association and Friends of Kingston Beach in existence but neither appear to be very active at present.

There is considerable concern among the community about proposals for additional housing development close to the beach. This could result in more beach users and increased pressure on the facilities and environment. At the same time, it could provide an opportunity to address some of these issues through securing funds via the planning system.



Step 4. Reflect, discuss and plan next steps

At this point, it will be important to reflect on the information gathered, discuss it with the management team for the park and plan the next steps that might be needed to make progress towards enabling positive changes in the park or green space.

These may include:

- **Commissioning further work** to fill any gaps in information. This could include ecological surveys, further social engagement to understand how people use and value the park, initiation of citizen science projects, more investigation of the ecosystem services or other specific benefits (such as health/wellbeing, benefits to the local community or economy) delivered by the park. This may be dependent on available budgets and where these are under pressure, creative use of low-cost options or partnership with local people and institutions should be explored.
- Further developing **a vision and plans for change** - and how to engage park users and local people in this process (see the section below on 'co-creating change'). The aim should be to set out a process for this that eventually results in a **management plan** for the park or green space which has been developed with and supported by users and local people.
- Understanding any **funds and skills development** required to deliver the kind of management envisioned - and motivating and mobilising support across relevant local government departments where this is necessary.
- Creating a plan to work with local people and partners to explore **collaborative and innovative approaches to delivering enhancements** to the park for nature and people. The 'Future Parks Accelerator' Programme (a collaboration between Heritage Lottery Fund and National Trust) provides case studies and resources on how to improve financial sustainability of parks and green spaces and may provide some inspiration. <https://www.futureparks.org.uk/>

Photo: Resources4Change

Co-creating change in parks and green spaces

The steps above will provide park managers with information with which to start to develop ideas for improving parks and green spaces for nature and people. Findings from the Sussex Green Space Project and processes such as ‘planning for real’ indicate that a key condition of success is the bringing together of ‘inside experts’ (local people, park users) with ‘outside experts’ (people brought into advise) as partners in designing future management and change.

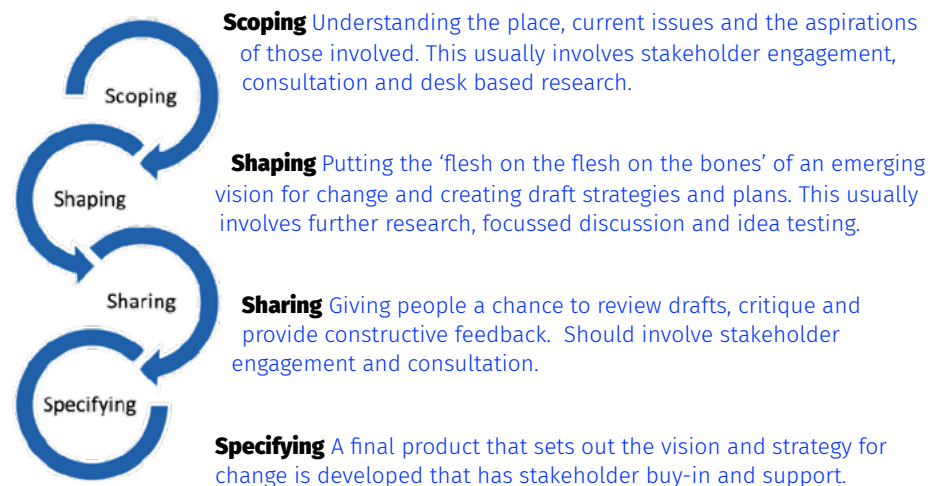
A recommendation of the Sussex Green Space Project is therefore to plan for change in parks and green spaces using the principle of **‘co-creation’**: which means putting users and the local community at the centre of the conversation about why, where, how change in these spaces happens. It is about working with, not for the community and it is about recognising the value of local skills, knowledge and ideas in finding creative solutions. Co-creation when used to plan for nature and people will help to deliver a range of important outcomes for our parks, green spaces, nature and the people who use and benefit from them:

- New collaborative relationships
- Enhanced capacity for park management (skills, motivation and knowledge)
- Shared solutions for identified challenges
- More nature
- Enhanced wellbeing, contact with more nature
- Better place making
- Informed and empowered communities, willing to act for nature

The information and ideas collated using this guide will form part of a **first scoping phase** in a process for identifying a vision and change for a park or green space.

There are **four** proposed phases to co-creating change for parks and green spaces. These are shown below. To emphasise that this process is centred around engagement with people through conversations and discussions about change, it has been called **“Park Chat”**.

The steps set out in this guide feed into the **first scoping phase** of this process: which sets out to understand the place, identify its importance to nature and people and the benefits it provides. It will also help to gather early ideas and thoughts about its potential and start the process of engagement with those who use and value the space.



“Park chat” phases: co-creation of change in parks and green spaces (Resources4Change)

Sussex Green Space Project carried out an assessment of the Maurice Thornton Recreation Ground in Hailsham and then worked with local community groups to co-create a vision for the park which can now be taken forward by these groups in association with the Town and District Councils.



Resources

Blank summary tables

Legend

Condition of asset Good*** Moderate ** Poor *
 Potential condition Good *** Moderate ** Poor *
 Recommendation Protect, Enhance and/or Expand
 The asset currently delivers benefits on this site ■ The asset possibly delivers benefits on this site (or very small level of benefit) □

Natural Capital Assets		Condition and Potential				Nature		Quality of local environment					People (users)				Community , culture & economy			
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Habitats																				
Woodland	Woodland copses/trees																			
	Ancient & Veteran trees																			
Grassland	Amenity grassland																			
	Flowery grassland																			
	Long/ unmown grassland																			
Hedges																				
Scrub/shrubs																				
Vegetation	Tall herb vegetation																			
	Mosaic of vegetation																			
Wetland																				
Stream or ditch																				
Pond or Lake																				
Coastal Habitats																				
Marine area																				
Planting/beds	Flower beds																			
	Annual bedding plants																			
	Herbaceous perennials																			
	Ornamental shrubbery																			
Native Plants																				
Others?																				

Legend
 Condition of asset Good*** Moderate ** Poor *
 Potential condition Good *** Moderate ** Poor *
 Recommendation Protect, Enhance and/or Expand
 The asset currently delivers benefits on this site ■ The asset possibly delivers benefits on this site (or very small level of benefit) □

Natural Capital Assets	Condition and Potential				Nature			Quality of local environment					People (users)					Community , culture & economy	
	Asset present/absent	Condition (current)	Condition (potential)	Recommendation	Biodiversity/wildlife	Pollination	Natural pest control	Air quality & noise regulation	Water quality regulation	Flood regulation	Urban cooling & shading	Carbon storage	Sense of Place/belonging	Connection to Nature	Access & Recreation	Health and wellbeing	Learning & Education	Social Interaction	Commercial activity
Natural Features																			
Brick/ stone walls																			
Rocks, rockery or stonework																			
Gravel paths																			
Deadwood																			
Log/ twig piles																			
Compost heaps																			
Wooden posts/rails																			
Wild flowers/ continuity of flowering																			
Species Diversity																			
Gravestones																			
Bat Boxes																			
Bird Boxes																			
Old walls with soft mortar																			
Sustainable Urban Drainage Features (SuDS)																			
Green Roofs																			
Natural Boundary Features																			
Timber Groynes																			
Buildings that may provide roosting sites (birds/bats)																			
Community Garden																			

Other Indicators of importance		
Flagship or rare species present		Yes/ No
Visibility of wildlife/wildflowers		Yes/ No
Presence of INNS		Yes/ No
Structural complexity of vegetation		Yes/ No
Habitat connectivity	Onsite	Yes/ No
	With surroundings	Yes/ No
Ratio of vegetation to bare soils and concrete/tarmac		Low/Med/Low
Ratio of 'ecological area' to amenity area		Low/ Med/High

Legend

Condition of asset Good*** Moderate ** Poor *

Potential condition Good *** Moderate ** Poor *

Recommendation Protect, Enhance and/or Expand

The asset currently delivers benefits on this site ■ The asset possibly delivers benefits on this site (or very small level of benefit) □

Natural Capital Assets	Condition and Potential				Nature			Quality of local environment					People (users)				Community culture & economy		
	Asset present/absent	Condition (current)	Condition (potential)	Recommendation	Biodiversity/wildlife	Pollination	Natural pest control	Air quality & noise regulation	Water quality regulation	Flood regulation	Urban cooling & shading	Carbon storage	Sense of Place/belonging	Connection to Nature	Access & Recreation	Health and wellbeing	Learning & Education	Social Interaction	Commercial activity
Built Assets																			
Open access land and routes																			
Visitor Infrastructure	Parking (vehicles)																		
	Parking (disabled)																		
	Parking (bicycles)																		
	Café/ kiosk																		
	Play area(s)																		
	Outdoor gym																		
	Paths/trails																		
	Paths accessible to all																		
	Toilets																		
	Bins																		
	Seating																		
	Covered/group meeting areas																		
	Playing fields and formal sports facilities																		
	Clubhouse/pavilion																		
	Signage & Interpretation																		
	Noticeboards/ community and events information																		
	Online/website information																		
	Heritage / historic features/ historic landscape																		

Legend
 Condition of asset Good*** Moderate ** Poor *
 Potential condition Good *** Moderate ** Poor *
 Recommendation Protect, Enhance and/or Expand
 The asset currently delivers benefits on this site ■ The asset possibly delivers benefits on this site (or very small level of benefit) □

Natural Capital Assets		Condition and Potential				Nature			Quality of local environment					People (users)				Community , culture & economy		
		Asset present/absent	Condition (current)	Condition (potential)	Recommendation	Biodiversity/wildlife	Pollination	Natural pest control	Air quality & noise regulation	Water quality regulation	Flood regulation	Urban cooling & shading	Carbon storage	Sense of Place/belonging	Connection to Nature	Access & Recreation	Health and wellbeing	Learning & Education	Social Interaction	Commercial activity
Cultural Assets																				
Governance in place	Designations or formal protection for the park																			
	Management Plan																			
	Green Flag Status																			
	Friends Group																			
Traditions or customs take place																				
Local skills and knowledge are used																				
Sensory elements and perceptions	Positive aesthetic/landscape quality																			
	Accessible natural areas																			
Volunteering Opportunities																				

Other Indicators of importance	
Level of Tranquility	High/Med/Low
Number of access points to the park	Yes/ No
Any negative detractors to user experience.	Yes/ No
If yes, provide details	



A suggested approach or 'pathway' for planning biodiversity improvements to green space produced by London Friends of Green Spaces Network (2021)

Resources

Documents and tools

The following links to documents and toolkits which may be of help are presented under theme headings.

Improving parks for nature

Various local authorities across the UK have been highlighting the need to 're-think' parks and green spaces for the benefit of nature and to build confidence and knowledge within staff and communities to enable them to work together to achieve this. They have produced the following resources which provide helpful and accessible information on the types of interventions and management actions that will be beneficial.

City of Edinburgh. Biodiversity in Parks and Green spaces http://www.fedaga.org.uk/uploads/1/6/1/0/16102276/biodiversity_in_parks_and_green_spaces_v3.pdf

Cambridge City Council. Parks and Open Spaces Biodiversity Toolkit. <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/9761/parks-and-open-spaces-biodiversity-toolkit.pdf>

Southwark Council. Guidance on creating habitat and biodiversity features for parks and open spaces in Southwark. https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2359/Guidance_on_creating_habitat_and_biodiversity_features_for_parks_and_open_spaces.pdf

London Friends of Green Spaces Network: infographic. Pathway to biodiversity improvement in your green space. <http://www.lfgn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Pathway-to-Biodiversity-Improvement-in-Your-Green-Space.pdf>

Greater London Authority. A guide to enhancing natural habitats in London's parks and green spaces in a changing climate. http://downloads.gigl.org.uk/website/parks_people_and_nature1.pdf

Nature and natural capital in Sussex

Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre - can provide you with information on habitats and species found in and around your park. <https://sxbrc.org.uk/home/>

Natural Capital Investment Strategy for Sussex (2019). Prepared by Sussex Nature Partnership this may be useful in understanding more about the natural capital of Sussex. http://sussexlnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/24.-Natural-Capital-Investment-Strategy_ADOPTED_Final_Dec-2019.pdf

People and Nature Network (PANN). This is a green infrastructure framework for the South Downs National Park and adjacent districts. It defines priority natural capital areas for investment and its evidence base may contain information that may be relevant to your green space. <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/partnership-management/people-and-nature-network-pann/>

Natural England Green Infrastructure Mapping. This may be useful in identifying other green infrastructure in the proximity of your park or green space and understanding its context. <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Map.aspx>

Citizen Science in parks

The Parks Trust has identified useful websites about citizen science project that already exist nationally. <https://www.theparkstrust.com/get-involved/outdoor-learning/free-activities-and-resources/nature-challenges-and-projects/become-a-citizen-scientist/>

The Conservation Volunteers also provides useful information about citizen science projects across the country and has drafted a guide to getting the community involved in such projects. https://www.tcv.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/community_citizen_science_guidance_updated_final_0.pdf

Mapping and quantifying ecosystem services

City of Edinburgh/ University of Edinburgh mapping toolkit for parks. This innovative app-based mapping tool enables park managers and users (volunteers) to

map natural assets within a park and not wildlife sightings/photos. Under its bonnet is a calculator which scores the ecosystem services provided by these habitats and features which was originally developed by Scottish Wildlife Trust. This tool is still in development stages but Sussex Nature Partnership will follow up with University of Edinburgh to explore possible application in Sussex once the prototype has been completed. For information about the tool see <https://www.thrivinggreenspaces.scot/news/article/5/green-infrastructure-mapping-pilot-project>

The NATURE tool. This tool is designed to help those developing projects (e.g. developers) identify the ecosystem services being delivered in place before and after a project. Whilst aimed at developers, it has been used on parks during its development to help guide change towards increasing the ecosystem services delivered by parks. <https://nature-tool.com/>

Natural England's EBN tool. This is similar to the NATURE tool and is designed to be used in a similar way (to understand ecosystem services delivered from a site and identify how this would change if modifications to the site are applied through development. As with the NATURE tool, it may also be useful for application to parks to provide 'baseline' estimation of the various ecosystem services it provides and how these might change with future proposals. <https://ecosystemsknowledge.net/Environmental-Benefits-from-Nature>

RAWES (Rapid Assessment of Wetlands for Ecosystem Services) - is a technique that can be applied to all habitat types. Download includes guide and assessment sheets. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342412643_RAPID_ASSESSMENT_OF_WETLAND_ECOSYSTEM_SERVICES_RAWES_-_A_practitioner's_guide

UK Parliament. Urban Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services (overview/evidence base) <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pb-0026/>

Assessing Health and Well Being Benefits of Parks

Health Parks: Assessment Toolkit. This toolkit provides a mechanisms for assessing health and wellbeing benefits of parks via 'green space health audits'. <https://www.healthparks.co.uk/>

Visitor Numbers/ digital data

Greenkeeper. This tool uses digital data to estimate and track recreational visits to green spaces in England, Wales and Scotland (it holds data for 20 000 parks). This is used with the tool to help to estimate the value of the park in monetary terms. It is aimed at local authorities and developers seeking to understand the impact of any changes on the natural capital and wider economic value of a park. <https://www.greenkeeperuk.co.uk/> (fees apply).

University of Edinburgh/Nesta project (Part of a Rethinking Parks project). An innovation project gathering data on the value of parks for people and nature using digital sensors of various kinds. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/rethinking-parks/university-edinburgh-parklife/>

Social engagement approaches

Community Planning Handbook by Nick Wates (Earthscan). Full of tools and techniques for social engagement. It can be downloaded using the following link https://library.uniteddiversity.coop/REconomy_Resource_Pack/Community_Assets_and_Development/The_Community_Planning_Handbook-How_People_Can_Shape_Their_C.pdf

Talking about our place toolkit. Produced by NatureScot. Provide tools and techniques for community engagement. A copy can be downloaded using this link. <https://www.nature.scot/enjoying-outdoors/communities-and-landscape/talking-about-our-place-toolkit>

Planning for Real. A tried and tested approach to working with a community to developing a vision, objectives and action plan. Their website provides access to training and resources. www.planningforreal.org.uk/



Waxcap Fungi, Uckfield Cemetery. Photo K Ryland

Why parks are important: evidence

Making Parks Count: the case for parks. The Parks Alliance (2020) <https://www.theparksalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Making-Parks-Count-Compressed-Documents.pdf>

Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces. Fields in Trust (2018). <https://www.fieldsintrust.org/revaluing#:~:text=Revaluing%20Parks%20and%20Green%20Spaces%20aims%20to%20change%20perceptions%20by,what%20they%20cost%20to%20maintain.>

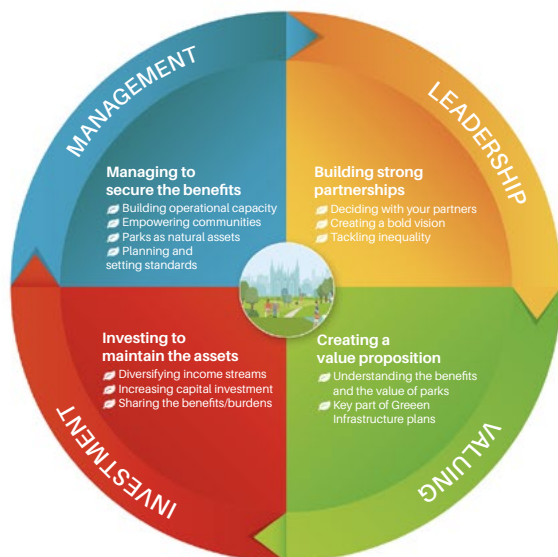
Commons Select Committee (CLG) Inquiry into Parks (2017). Why do parks matter? <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/45/4502.htm>

Green spaces and climate resilience <https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/pages/category/climate-resilience>

Why parks matter



How to make parks count



Space to thrive: A rapid evidence review of the benefits of parks and green spaces for people and communities. Dobson, J., Harris, C., Eadson, W., and Gore, T. (2019). The National Lottery Heritage Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund, London. <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/insight/research/space-thrive>

Heritage Lottery Fund. **Evaluation of the HLF Parks for People Programme** which provides evidence for the value of investing in parks. <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/insight/evaluation/parks-people-why-should-we-invest-parks>

Natural capital Valuations of green spaces

Very few detailed economic valuations of the natural capital of individual parks or green spaces have been produced. However, these examples below do help to illustrate the type of information this approach can provide for decision-makers.

Silverdale Country Park Natural Capital Account (Stoke on Trent). <https://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-Land-Trust-Natural-Capital-Valuation-of-Silverdale-Country-Park-Final-edited.pdf>

Natural Capital Assessment in Northern Ireland: Urban Study. Report by natural Capital Solutions (2018) prepared for Northern Ireland Environment Link. <https://www.nienvironmentlink.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/NI-urban-natural-capital-study-FINAL-2.pdf>

Much more common is for natural capital accounts to be developed for a suite of green spaces in an administrative areas - which are intended to inform wider strategic policy and funding decisions. Examples include:

Greater London Authority. Natural capital account for London's public green spaces. <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/parks-green-spaces-and-biodiversity/green-infrastructure/natural-capital-account-london?source=vanityurl>

The Parks Alliance report "Making Parks Count: the case for parks provides a very helpful summary of the evidence base for parks and 'why they matter'. It also proposes a framework for their leadership, management, investment and valuation. <https://www.theparksalliance.org/making-parks-count-the-case-for-parks/>

Derry & Strabane (Northern Ireland). Natural capital account of Outdoor recreation spaces. https://www.derrystrabane.com/getmedia/71c0408f-c089-4358-93ba-3543c2131ce8/NaturalCapitalReport_2021_ONLINE.pdf

City of Edinburgh. The value of City of Edinburgh Council's Parks. This goes beyond a natural capital account and uses the concept of 'social return on investment' to assess wider social benefits of parks in the city. <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/parks-greenspaces/value-councils-parks/1>

Whilst carried out for a much larger landscape, this approach to natural capital assessment was very helpful in shaping ideas within the Sussex Green Space project. **New Forest National Park Authority (2019).** Understanding the New forest's Capital and how its management provides public goods to the nation. <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/protecting-nature/understanding-the-new-forests-natural-capital/>

Finances and skills

Future Parks Accelerator. Joint project between Heritage Lottery Fund, National Trust and Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Its aim is to help local authorities to transform their green spaces and help them to achieve financial sustainability. Resources from case studies can be found here <https://www.futureparks.org.uk/about>

A **London Green Space Skills Hub** is being launched in London by the Mayor's Office to provide opportunities for wider training and skills development. <https://greenspaceskillshub.london/>. This is in early stages of development but may be a useful source of information in the future.

Sussex Green Space Project

More information on the Sussex Green Space Project, including 7 case studies of this approach in Sussex, can be found on the Sussex Nature Partnership website <http://sussexlnp.org.uk/>

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Dolphin Ecological Surveys





Vegetated Shingle, Kingston Beach. Photo K Ryland