



Summary 11: The achievements and benefits of a coordinated approach to the development and delivery of green infrastructure

'The environment is a key under-exploited economic resource for the region and part of our quality of life. It is important to nurture the natural resources of the region and **develop a strategy for green infrastructure.**' (Northwest Regional Economic Strategy, 2006)

Key messages

- A partnership of environmental organisations working with the economic partners in the region has delivered significant and cost-effective benefits by creating an integrated coalition to work on the Northwest's green infrastructure.
- The work in progress represents a new and radical approach that seeks to plan, deliver and manage green infrastructure in comparable ways to other forms of critical infrastructure. The aim is to maximise its economic, social and environmental benefits.
- The Natural Economy Northwest programme has played a key role in stimulating this development.
- The NENW programme will cease at the end of 2009. Partners are considering how best to secure the flow of benefits.

The context

Action 113 of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) recognises the natural environment's contribution towards the goals of increasing the quality of life and delivering additional economic gain in the Northwest. The Natural Economy Northwest programme (NENW) was given the lead role for this RES action. To ensure maximum impact and effectiveness, it linked with a range of leading environmental organisations.

At the start of the programme in 2006, the concept of 'green infrastructure' was being rapidly developed. In a nutshell, the idea was that the natural environment could be better understood, planned and delivered if viewed in a coherent way as a multifunctional mosaic of green spaces that deliver multiple economic, social and environmental benefits.

The programme has been highly successful. The fruits include the development of planning for green infrastructure in each sub-region; building green infrastructure into regional policies; and an articulation of the many benefits gained by adopting a planned approach.

Two key steps have boosted the programme's effectiveness. The first was to build on an existing informal liaison group of key regional partners active on green infrastructure, and establish this as the NW Green Infrastructure Steering Group. The members are listed at the end of this summary.

The second was to integrate it with the work of the Green Infrastructure Think Tank (GrITT), Green Infrastructure Unit (GIU) and the associated Green Infrastructure Forum. The Green Infrastructure Steering Group guides not only the green infrastructure element of the NENW programme but also the general development of green infrastructure in the region and the work of GrITT, GIU, the GI Forum and other support organisations.

This partnership structure has made a significant and cost-effective contribution to the cause of improving the natural environment for the benefit of all. One recent outcome is a green infrastructure research project involving three adjacent regions. This and other achievements and benefits are examined in more detail below. Further information, and a range of reports and case studies, is available on the websites listed at the end.

The achievements and benefits

The partnership has helped secure an impressive list of achievements that have helped to advance the development and delivery of green infrastructure and its associated benefits:

(i) Advocacy and championing.

Members have been able to share ideas and opinions and evolve a unified set of messages. The development of this regional environmental voice has helped to influence regional policy development, from growth points to the regional spatial strategy. It will continue to positively support and influence the development of the new regional strategy and local development frameworks.

(ii) Commissioning research.

Green infrastructure is being developed by a broad and informal coalition of practitioners and planners. This bottom-up approach has required the simultaneous development of knowledge, evidence and expertise. Much effort has been invested in developing the evidence base for the economic, social and environmental benefits of green infrastructure. This includes the inter-regional research project noted above, to develop tools to demonstrate the value of specific green infrastructure proposals to a wide range of potential investors.

(iii) Providing guidance.

By developing and publishing a comprehensive set of guidance documents on the planning, development and delivery of green infrastructure at all scales, it has been possible to answer some of the many questions that inevitably arise from such a new approach.

(iv) Disseminating knowledge.

The green infrastructure partnership has disseminated the accumulated research and guidance to a wide audience. For example, the 11 economic benefits of green infrastructure are now used widely across the Northwest and beyond. The Green Infrastructure Forum is an efficient way of engaging with a very wide partnership and securing endorsement for the work being carried out.

(v) Promoting innovation.

This new field of knowledge demands innovative ways of addressing issues. The region has made significant contributions to this knowledge base by developing techniques for mapping, assessing the value of and need for green infrastructure, and providing the evidence upon which interventions can be planned and justified. The GRITT brings together practitioners, planners, consultants and academics, whose expertise creates a potent environment for developing and testing ideas.

(vi) Integrating and coordinating environmental, social and economic benefits.

The Green Infrastructure Steering Group coordinates the work of the groups created in the Northwest, resulting in a high level of efficiency. This avoids duplication, shares resources, delivers the required actions at the right time and produces cost-effective results.

(vii) Training and capacity building.

As green infrastructure planning increasingly becomes a feature of national, regional and local plans and strategies, practitioners urgently need the capacity to put these plans into action. The green infrastructure partnership meets this need by providing assistance and training. Through demonstration projects and

case studies it has been able to show the benefits of embedding green infrastructure in economic and regeneration projects.

(viii) Supporting sub-regional and regional economic planning.

Sub-regional planning is important to the development of green infrastructure. The green infrastructure partnership has been very active in providing guidance and support to enable each of the five sub-regional partnerships to lead on integrating green infrastructure into sub-regional and city-regional economic and social planning. This has also ensured that their green infrastructure plans can be aggregated into a coherent regional picture. It puts the region in a unique position to plan and manage its green infrastructure at each of the key scales. In parallel, the partnership has been delivering programmes under the NW Climate Change Action Plan, and contributing to the evidence base for the new regional strategy.

As Hazel Blears, secretary of state for communities and local government, has pointed out in her foreword to the NENW report on *The Economic Benefits of Green Infrastructure*: 'Green infrastructure needs to be planned, developed and managed just like all other forms of infrastructure, if society is to thrive and prosper'

Find out more

Natural Economy Northwest
www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk

Green Infrastructure Northwest
www.greeninfrastructurenw.org.uk

The members of the NW Green Infrastructure Steering group are: 4NW, CABE, Community Forests NW, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Government Office NW, Natural England, Natural Economy NW, and the Northwest Development Agency.

