

SECTION 1.0  
INTRODUCTION

Green infrastructure will shape the future economic, social and environmental success of the Leeds City Region by harnessing the potential of existing environmental resources to promote sustainable economic growth and to tackle climate change.

## 1.1 A VISION OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE LEEDS CITY REGION

The Leeds City Region, illustrated on Figure S1: Reference Map, covers over 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to nearly 3m people, over 100,000 businesses and a workforce of 1.5m people in an economy worth £51bn<sup>1</sup>. It comprises the cities and districts of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield, Barnsley, York, Craven, Harrogate and Selby and includes part of North Yorkshire.

The city region therefore has one of the most significant and powerful economies in the UK. At the same time, the area covers some of the UK's grandest areas of natural beauty and landscape, which has created a strong regional identity and provides a natural resource around which to plan and deliver sustainable growth for future generations.

These natural assets, our green infrastructure, represent a key economic driver for the city region. Our high quality environment attracts businesses and private sector investment, together with skilled workers. Indeed, green infrastructure has shaped the functional economic geography of the city region itself. The urban areas of the city region are surrounded by a diverse rural hinterland that offers a unique quality of life for its residents

and a strong incentive for businesses to locate and invest in the area. This mutual bond between our urban and rural areas must be reinforced.

The Leeds City Region Partnership is now at the forefront of economic development planning and delivery in the UK. Our mission is “*to develop an internationally recognised city-region; to raise our economic performance; to spread prosperity across the whole of our city region, and to promote a better quality of life for all of those who live and work here.*”<sup>2</sup> In order to deliver this mission, we cannot afford not to invest in and plan for green infrastructure. Our natural environment is not a helpful by-product of economic growth but a fundamental driver and shaper of that growth. Without it, the city region's ambitious plans for investing in new homes, jobs, skills and transport will struggle to deliver quality or be able to address the growing challenges of climate change. Hence, this strategy focuses on how green infrastructure will deliver our sustainable urban growth agenda.

FIGURE S1: REFERENCE MAP



In the midst of an economic recovery, competition for public sector funds as well as the short-term viability of regeneration schemes could pose a risk to investment in a high quality natural environment. However, we know that green infrastructure is a value generator, not a costly add-on. Investing in green infrastructure will not only help the city region out of the recession in the short term; it will also support our ambitions to become a low carbon, sustainable economy and continue to attract quality businesses and create jobs for many years to come.

The Leeds City Region has commissioned the Green Infrastructure Strategy to ensure that future growth is underpinned and supported by high quality green infrastructure. As such, the strategy will sit alongside the other core city region initiatives such as Housing & Regeneration, Employment & Skills, Transport and Economic Drivers and Innovation, to drive sustainable economic growth.



## 1.2 WHAT IS GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

Green infrastructure is a combination of environmental assets and man-made features that have a semi-natural component. Useful and usable green infrastructure exists as much in our densely built up towns and cities as it does in rural areas, and includes high quality, designated or intensively managed assets as well as areas that are neglected or degraded as a result of current or past land use. Indeed, areas of waste ground on former industrial sites can often be seen to perform a great many green infrastructure functions and are highly valued by the people that live in close proximity to them, not least because of the wildlife they attract and the opportunities they present for recreation.

As such, what constitutes green infrastructure is wide ranging. In broad terms it includes semi-natural habitats such as woodlands, moorlands and river corridors; nature reserves and other outdoor destinations; cultural and historic sites such parks and gardens, historic buildings and ancient monuments; as well as features of the wider rural landscape such as footpaths, hedgerows and game coverts. In urban areas, green infrastructure assets include open spaces such as allotments, public parks, cemeteries and previously developed land; features that provide

public access such as canals, towpaths, and cycleways; as well as man-made features such as swales and green roofs on buildings. Areas of public realm also constitute green infrastructure where these contain natural elements such as street trees.

It is the functionality of these wide ranging assets that shapes the places we live, work and enjoy recreational activities, and they will play an increasingly important role in securing future prosperity and quality of life. Indeed, even some of the city region's most damaged and degraded areas have potential to deliver green infrastructure benefits; their value to local people being in the services they provide as well as the cultural or personal associations they have with them.

Traditionally, environmental planning has looked at the functions of these assets in isolation, such as biodiversity, open space provision or public realm design. Whilst we should not devalue the benefits of looking at these issues separately, a green infrastructure approach considers how together these assets form an overall 'system'. In particular, green infrastructure planning embraces the full range of social, economic and environmental benefits



that green infrastructure assets can provide when considered together. Although green infrastructure assets do not necessarily need to be connected to one another to realise their value, networks of green infrastructure can bring with them additional benefits. For example, at the local level, using green corridors to link new settlements with existing green infrastructure assets has the potential to transform the prosperity and health of a community. Similarly, linking isolated habitats can help maintain populations of rare or threatened species by increasing their resilience to change.

Green infrastructure planning can be seen to operate at a range of spatial scales. At the very local scale, action by individuals, perhaps through accommodating areas of semi-natural habitat in their gardens or growing vegetables, can make a significant contribution to their quality of life and the environment more generally. At the neighbourhood scale, local planning authorities, community groups and voluntary organisations are transforming sizable areas of land in and around where people live and work for the benefit of large numbers of local people. Actions might include clearing up a stretch of canal or improving a piece of waste ground and creating a new park with space for nature and play. When considered together, small scale interventions can make a significant difference to people's lives and address a range of important agendas.

This strategy operates at the city regional scale of green infrastructure planning. Whilst acknowledging and celebrating the actions of a wide range of groups and individuals that are already taking place at the local scale, it sets out the interventions required to make a difference for the benefit of the whole city region. It focuses on the big issues, and identifies the need for significant investment. It is not a replacement for the work already underway; rather it is a commitment at the highest levels of planning to deliver strategic green infrastructure initiatives for the benefit of all.



## 1.3 WHY INVEST IN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE?

Many recent reports, from the internationally acclaimed Stern Review on Climate Change<sup>3</sup> to national guidance by the Department for Communities and Local Government<sup>4</sup>, the Commission for the Built Environment (CABE)<sup>5</sup>, Natural England<sup>6</sup> and Landscape Institute<sup>7</sup> have researched and set out the many benefits of investing in green infrastructure and the evidence will continue to develop in the coming years.

In particular, work commissioned by the Northern Way<sup>8</sup> has identified how planning for green infrastructure at a city region scale can support economic growth. This range of benefits has been embraced with great success by other city regions in the north and has provided the context for the highly successful Natural Economy North West programme<sup>9</sup>. The following section highlights the well established benefits of investing in green infrastructure:

- **Addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation** by using tree planting for natural air cooling and CO<sub>2</sub> absorption. Sound investment now will contribute to health and well-being of existing residents as well as lower the burden on future generations to address their economic and environmental problems.
- **Tackling flood alleviation and water management** by installing sustainable urban drainage systems, permeable surfaces and open spaces in urban areas and upstream water catchment management techniques in the wider countryside. Coordinated action in urban and rural areas will improve the resilience of cities, towns, villages and farmland to cope with the increased threat of flooding.
- **Improving quality of place** by using the natural environment to create high quality living and recreational environments and a setting for where we live and work. Investment now will create places in which people will take great pride and want to be part of for their whole lives.
- **Improving physical and mental health and social well-being** by creating good quality green space and opportunities for relaxation and healthy physical activity as well as providing the infrastructure necessary to encourage people to walk, run, cycle and play for health improvement. In addition creating safe and attractive walking and cycling routes to encourage active travel will also bring benefits.

- **Improving skills and educational attainment** by providing an ‘outdoor classroom’ to learn new skills or understand more about the way we live, how our culture has evolved and where our society is heading in the future. Investment in green infrastructure can provide the facilities and subject for learning across a wide range of agendas and academic disciplines as well as for the attainment of new skills.
- **Increasing land and property values** by creating attractive environments around new and existing residential, commercial and employment areas. Sustained investment in green infrastructure now will lower long term development costs, raise land values and stimulate further economic investment.
- **Sustaining economic growth and investment.** High quality environments also offer comparative location advantages to attract and retain business and a skilled labour pool.
- **Improving labour force productivity.** High quality environments around where people live and work can inspire higher productivity and lower absenteeism amongst workforces.
- **Increasing tourism** by improving the ‘tourism offer’ through widespread environmental improvements, and targeted activity to improve the setting, functionality and accessibility of key destinations. Environmental improvements can enhance the appearance of tourism destinations to attract visitors as well as create destinations close to where people live, reducing the need to travel or perhaps relieving pressure on sensitive destinations.
- **Enhancing recreational and leisure opportunities** by creating new or improving existing assets. Investment in green infrastructure can provide multifunctional open spaces and parks bringing benefit to people, wildlife and the environment more generally.
- **Protecting and enhancing landscape character and biodiversity** by using land improvements and management to deliver biodiversity gain and overall landscape enhancement. Continuing to invest in semi natural assets and the environment more generally will enable our wildlife and precious habitats and landscapes to thrive.
- **Obtaining products from the land** by using natural assets sourced locally in favour of imported goods. Promoting and investing in local biomass and food growing initiatives will create new economic value, reduce our dependency on imported goods and services and increase the symbiotic relationship between people and their environment.

Across the city region, green infrastructure projects, whilst not necessarily having been regarded as such, have formed a significant part of development and regeneration programmes over many years. For example many cities and towns have invested significant sums in urban renaissance programmes to create new, high quality public realm to lead the regeneration of their town centres, business parks and housing areas. In addition, there are several ongoing major woodland, countryside access and habitat restoration projects across the city region, funded and delivered by a wide range of public, private and independent agencies. And now, the Urban Eco-Settlement and Growth Point programmes in the city region are planning investment in green infrastructure on an unprecedented scale with the goal of creating high quality living and working environments that deliver excellent environmental performance.



## 1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

The Leeds City Region local authorities, in partnership with Natural England and a wide range of consultees, have prepared this strategy to set out the vision for green infrastructure in the city region and to determine how future investment in green infrastructure will be secured and where investment should be targeted. It also highlights areas where further work is needed; perhaps to refine an area of search in which investment will take place for a particular purpose or to establish the feasibility of delivering particular green infrastructure projects and investment programmes in a given location. By way of summary the strategy:

- complements national and pan-regional efforts to make the most positive use of our current and potential green infrastructure;
- identifies the value of green infrastructure assets and reinforces and promotes the compelling case for investing in them;
- underpins, and is supported by, other city region strategies;
- ensures green infrastructure complements other city region investment priorities such as those set out in the City Region Housing Investment Plan<sup>10</sup>;

- identifies the existing green infrastructure assets and partnership strengths on which the strategy will build;
- establishes the current priorities for green infrastructure investment at the city region level;
- sets out existing and potential mechanisms to finance ambitious green infrastructure investment priorities; and
- impels planning and housing policy work, and other practical local work, to support widespread improvements in green infrastructure across the partner authorities' areas.

The strategy is not a statutory planning document. Rather it identifies where we can add value to existing and future green infrastructure investment and interventions at the city region scale. In respect of taking forward the actions identified in the strategy, a separate delivery plan will be developed, setting out responsibilities and a timetable for action.



At the local level, local strategic partnerships work, local planning and housing work, and work on other local policy (such as recycling, reclamation, parks and open spaces, local sourcing, shared maintenance services, etc.) can explore and identify more precisely how the broad initiatives proposed in this strategy can be effectively pursued and realised on the ground. It will be especially important to factor in thinking about the strategic importance of green infrastructure into future local housing programmes, emerging regeneration schemes, urban fringe management and each authority's approach to managing and improving its network of green spaces. Such an approach will soon reveal many opportunities for low-cost, smaller-scale interventions which will cumulatively help to realise the full potential of the sub-region's green infrastructure, and help to create a more sustainable economy. In addition, local planners have a key role in encouraging all prospective developers to think about their contribution to building the green infrastructure of the future, area by area, site by site.

The methodology adopted in preparing the strategy follows the core principles of the city region partnership<sup>11</sup>:

*“We work as a city region because the day-to-day lives of people do not start and stop at local authority boundaries. The Leeds City Region Partnership is about councils working across the boundaries in which people choose to live, work and spend their leisure time.”*

The strategy is a result of continuous engagement of local partners from September 2009 to May 2010 and has benefitted from the many insights, strategies and plans of these partners, and especially Natural England and the White Rose Forest partnership (with its current Growing with the Leeds City Region Partnership Strategy 2009-2012<sup>12</sup> and project insights).

The evidence base underpinning the strategy is set out in an accompanying document – the Technical Baseline Report<sup>13</sup>. Insights from this evidence base are included in the next section.

