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Fields in Trust Standards

Creating great spaces for all



Foreword



A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to be 'L. S.', positioned below the portrait.

**HRH The Prince of Wales
Patron**

The green spaces we create today will help set the narrative for the collective health and wellbeing of the people of tomorrow, the places they live and work in and the natural environment around them. The importance of parks, playgrounds, sports fields and green spaces to our towns and cities has long been recognised and the need to protect their future has never been more relevant.

Fields in Trust pioneered the first minimum Standards for the provision of parks, playgrounds, sports fields and green spaces back in the 1930s and over time these Standards have evolved to reflect the changing landscape. Throughout this time Fields in Trust has consistently used its platform to influence the policies governing the creation of these spaces and championing the value they bring to us all.

Now, as Fields in Trust approaches its centenary, this latest interpretation reflects the need for a holistic approach to creating inspiring, inclusive and multi-functional spaces and for local decision makers and industry to work together to deliver them.

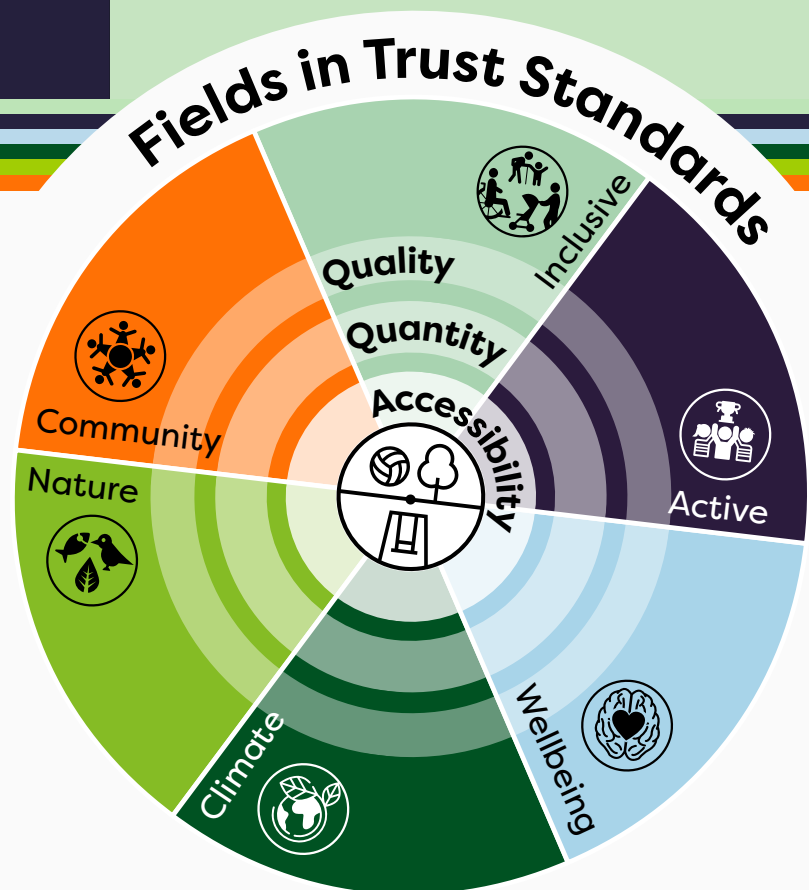
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We've been influencing how open and green space is created for almost 100 years but to continue we need your help. To find out more about supporting our work or becoming a strategic partner email info@fieldsintrust.org

This 2024 edition supersedes the previous edition 'Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard' last published in 2015.



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Front cover in order, top left to right: © 1) Helena Smith 2) Robin Forster 3) Christopher Swan 4) Neil Speakman, Studio Maple 5) LDA Design

The value of open space

Jumpers for goalposts

Everyone should have easy access to quality open, and preferably green, space. It helps shape us when we are young and keeps us healthy and active as we get older. Our parks, play spaces and sports fields are where lasting friendships are formed and memories made, where first goals are scored and backs patted; stabilisers taken off for wobbly bike rides; first kisses snatched.

The power of play on the doorstep cannot be underestimated. It is our connection to joy and to our better selves. Green spaces are where we realise that we are part of nature, not separate from it. Strengthening this relationship can help keep us well, mentally and physically, throughout our lives.

Welcoming parks and green spaces are social places helping to combat loneliness, which we now know to be as lethal as smoking, and other conditions that are on the rise including depression, ADHD, diabetes and anxiety. In fact, green space provides [health benefits](#) of £34 billion every year, saving the NHS at least £111 million annually by reducing GP visits. In urban environments, as the pandemic starkly showed, green space has proven to be a lifeline. It is valued, in different ways, by people from every background and ethnicity.

To recognise that value, open and green space needs to be celebrated, protected, maximised and placed at the heart of every new development or retrofit. These spaces are on the frontline of tackling climate breakdown, catastrophic nature loss and growing social inequality. They can help clean our air and cool our cities, reducing the urban heat island effect. They should be part of biodiverse green networks running through every town and city.

And yet, green spaces remain under threat of sale and development or are afterthoughts when it comes to masterplanning new settlements where the focus might be on quantity of new homes. We've all seen the lone seesaw, fenced off and set in a sea of concrete – unused and unloved.

Green spaces are often also under resourced and sometimes poorly managed. No-one wants to spend time in a place that is overgrown and not cared for. These spaces can sometimes be viewed as financial burdens rather than the incredible assets they are.

But if we value our open and green spaces, which we increasingly do, then we need to fight harder for them too. Put bluntly, once gone, they are gone forever.

Setting the Standard for today and tomorrow

Fields in Trust is the charity that protects the future of our parks, playgrounds, sports fields and green spaces, securing their future for generations to come. This includes lobbying policymakers and helping to provide [legal protection](#), so that these spaces cannot be sold. It involves working side-by-side with landowners to create solutions to enhance spaces for the benefit of local people and the environment. And, crucially, providing ongoing stewardship for the 3,000 spaces protected in perpetuity over the last 100 years.

The initial focus a century ago was on securing adequate playing fields and playgrounds to serve communities and to prevent open space being lost to industrialisation and urban sprawl. This founding purpose has grown ever more vital. It includes turning hopes and aspirations for open spaces in our communities into policy and reality.

Key was setting out clear Standards that local authorities, planners, designers and developers could follow. The Six-Acre Standard, as it became known, is a set of guidelines for the amount of open space that should be available for communities and includes a minimum amount of

green space per 1,000 people, as well as standards on accessibility, quality and delivery. Over time, these Standards have been updated in accordance with changes in policy and to address the challenges of the day.

Today, Fields in Trust is playing its part to support the UK's path to net zero and addressing the urgent need for nature recovery and greater social inclusion. For this new iteration, we have listened hard to the industry to understand what is working and what needs improving. We've taken steps to set out how the Standards can be used as a starting point to deliver the best possible outcome for communities.

The Standards are aimed at local authorities, developers, planners, urban designers and landscape architects for all stages of the planning, design and management of multifunctional green spaces.

The Standards may change to reflect wider shifts, but Fields in Trust's mission remains the same: to raise awareness of the value of our green spaces, drive systemic change, partner with others and champion the best ways to protect them and the joy they bring for the next century and beyond.

Green space provides health benefits of £34 billion every year, saving the NHS at least £111 million annually by reducing GP visits.

How to use the Standards

FIT Standards give a consistent, instructive guide which can be used alongside local standards to create betterment. Understanding the local context, assessing existing open space, and the needs of the local community early in the process is critical to plan and deliver the best outcomes. The Standards can be used to support this local knowledge and adapted to the individual context, so provision meets local need. They support the multifunctional use of open spaces, recognising the need to use land efficiently.

There are four key sections within the Standards:

Themes

To help drive a broader agenda of quality and accessibility of open spaces we have introduced a framework of themes in this edition that should be used alongside the FIT Benchmarks to improve the delivery of inclusive, multifunctional green spaces.

Design process

Demonstrating how the FIT Standards and resources can be used at typical project stages.

Benchmarks

The benchmarks enable calculations to be made on the quantity and accessibility of open space, outdoor sports and play spaces. They also guide the development of local open space policies and inform planning decisions on individual proposals. Essential to providing a starting point for effective design-led solutions, the benchmarks should be adapted to suit local circumstances, taking into account existing open space provision.

Case studies

The first open space Standards were pioneered to help ensure that sufficient space was being delivered to meet the sport, play and recreational needs of communities. In this latest edition, we have developed a set of case studies to inspire and showcase best practice in the application of the Standards. They tell a story of lessons learnt and how good outcomes can be delivered.

Signposting

To give a greater depth of knowledge and understanding around the many topics covered in this document, we have included signposts to some key organisations grouped by theme.

Planning context

The wider Planning context and policies relevant to each home nation and how those relate to the Standards can give a helpful framework for every project. These guides are available to download from [our website](#)

Accessible, safe and inclusive



Burgess Park, London. © Southwark Council

Asking the question “Who have we left out?” is all-important for designing and managing open spaces. The answers can ensure the spaces work for all ages, genders, cultures and abilities. Being truly inclusive demands meaningful and sustained engagement with the whole community.

Project design process

- establish a comprehensive understanding of the local community, being cognisant of their needs now and how the community may evolve
- engage the community and stakeholders at the point that the design and management of open space is being considered
- build an understanding of how different people use and access open space and ensure it considers the safety of vulnerable members of the community
- analyse the wider movement network to improve safe routes and transport options to access the open space
- recognise any barriers to access, safety and inclusivity such as level changes, surfacing, signage, lighting or anti-

social behaviour and identify ways to address these

- ensure the design and choice of play spaces are accessible to all, offering varying degrees of challenge and risk
- offer diversity and sensory stimulation for neurodiversity, providing for active, social and sensory open space and play, along with areas to relax

Project outcomes

will achieve spaces that

- create welcoming, inclusive and social areas for all ages, genders, cultures and abilities within the community
- provide safe access both during the day and at night and have addressed the potential impact of anti-social behaviour
- deliver accessible sustainable travel options with safe and enjoyable walking routes, public transport stops and cycle routes
- reflect local need and designed in collaboration with all the community
- include and enable children and young people of all ages and abilities to play together in a variety of ways

Promote active, healthy lifestyles



Everton Pond Garden, Liverpool. © Richard Scott

Quality open spaces on the doorstep make it easier to enjoy an active lifestyle. Where possible, they should make a broad offer, including sport, play and physical activities, so that they have a wide appeal. Assess the existing local provision and then work to complement that to maximise benefits.

- plan spaces and facilities that can accommodate a range of activities and events
- refer to home nation government organisations, play and sports councils for appropriate technical standards and provision of relevant ancillary facilities and equipment

Project design process

- understand local health challenges to inform how design can reduce inequalities of access and improve health outcomes
- consider how communities can engage in long-term stewardship that promotes and encourages outdoor activities such as planting and maintenance days
- engage with the local NHS Trust to understand how open spaces can support green and social prescribing initiatives
- engage with local schools to understand how they might use the space to increase opportunities for children to engage in outdoor physical activity

Project outcomes

will achieve spaces that

- provide a broad mix of outdoor sports experiences and environments with a range of activities, individual and team sports as well as rehabilitation
- deliver a diverse play offer that meets the needs of different ages, genders and abilities
- enable diverse use by community and organisation groups for a range of activities such as fitness boot camps, ParkRun, outdoor yoga, green gym activities and walking groups
- connect into wider routes and trails, and provide rest stops to enable safe and active routes for all

Support mental wellbeing



Alfred Place Gardens, London. © Neil Speakman / Studio Maple

It is well documented that open space has a positive impact on mental wellbeing and having good access can be a significant factor in addressing loneliness and isolation, depression and other mental health conditions.

Project design process

- engage with the NHS Trust or GPs to understand the local mental health challenges and priorities in the local community and how open spaces can support initiatives
- understand what types of open spaces already exist for this purpose and where opportunities to expand, enhance or provide new spaces exist
- consult with health practitioners in order to engage people with a range of mental health issues in the design process to better understand how they might use a space
- speak to people about how they could engage in long-term stewardship activities for example gardening, events or maintenance that promotes mental wellbeing
- understand what existing local organisations and community

groups exist that support mental wellbeing and what type of spaces or involvement would benefit them

- locate and plan spaces and routes that are connected and facilitate community interaction with meeting and seating areas

Project outcomes

will achieve spaces that

- provide quiet, reflective or sensory areas with appropriate seating
- encourage access to nature and engagement with wildlife such as pond dipping, bird watching, edible hedgerows or bug hotels
- welcome community and organisation groups that support mental wellbeing including community planting and growing opportunities and initiatives such as Men's Sheds
- encourage social interaction and activity, promoting neighbourliness in new communities
- provide integrated and connected spaces located where they are of most value to the community

Resilient to climate change



Sheffield's Grey to Green project by Castlegate.

Climate breakdown is one of the challenges of our age. Our open spaces need to work hard so that they are as resilient as possible to wetter winters and hotter summers. This means taking action to address the risk of flooding, reduce air pollution and the urban heat island effect, support nature recovery and reduce carbon to future-proof our communities.

Project design process

- consider the local environmental context and identify opportunities to reduce impact of extreme weather events such as flooding, drought or heatwaves
- consider drainage requirements and potential for dual use or integration of open space and play with sustainable drainage systems
- work with suppliers and contractors to specify materials and planting that reduce carbon by consideration of their use, impact and local reuse of materials

- partner with biodiversity experts to identify native plant species that are resilient to climate change
- plan in active travel routes that connect facilities and open spaces

Project outcomes

will achieve spaces that

- reduce the impact of extreme weather
- integrate sustainable drainage systems using naturalistic landforms
- provide shelter and shade that improves air quality by absorbing pollutants and providing natural filters with specified carbon capture planting
- use recycled and low embodied carbon materials that are robust and can be easily replaced
- integrate active travel, reduce car dependency and enable sustainable transport choices

Provide space for nature to thrive



Buckler's Park, Crowthorne. © McGregor Smith

Biodiverse open spaces act like stepping stones to form a wider green network, key to supporting nature recovery. Designing to maximise these connections, by creating new habitats and linking and enhancing existing ones, is critical to future resilience. It will also help to bring nature – and joy – back into people's everyday lives.

Project design process

- build an understanding of existing local habitats, trees and wildlife to maximise the opportunities to enhance biodiversity, this may include working with an ecologist and arboriculturist
- understand any local nature strategies and how recommendations can be delivered on site
- refer to specialist organisations for expert guidance and research
- consider a space in three dimensions and how surrounding buildings and vertical structures can support biodiversity with the installation of bird feeding stations, nesting boxes etc

Project outcomes

will achieve spaces that

- enhance biodiversity as well as contribute to local nature strategies
- retain, incorporate and enhance existing planting, corridors and habitats
- specify planting for its habitat value to encourage pollinators and provide habitat corridors to connect to adjacent countryside
- connect people to nature with sensory experiences throughout the seasons, viewing areas or nature trails
- provide information to educate people about the role open spaces have in supporting nature

Adaptable to community needs



A Common Plan for Claridge Way, Thamesmead, London. © Jan Kattein Architects

Land is a precious resource and so we need to make the most of our open spaces, ensuring they are multifunctional, where possible, and giving them a wide appeal that brings people together. These spaces need to respond to evolving local needs, opportunities and funding changes.

Project design process

- involve the community in a co-design process to ensure all ages and voices are heard and incorporated in the eventual design solution
- identify the facilities and infrastructure required to enable a range of activities and events to co-exist in single or multiple spaces, examples include toilets, power and water supply
- consider the whole life cycle of spaces and equipment when specifying products and materials
- develop long-term stewardship, management and maintenance plans early in the design process to ensure quality can be retained over time and repair and replacement can be facilitated

- identify present and future funding opportunities to support the ongoing management of the space

Project outcomes

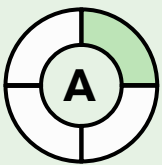
will achieve spaces that

- offer high-quality, well-managed and supported community assets
- have long-term stewardship plans in place with an agreed, funded and sustainable approach to management and maintenance
- provide flexibility and ability to host a range of events and activities suited to the local community
- represent the community's voice and thereby facilitate their involvement for the longer term

Project design stages

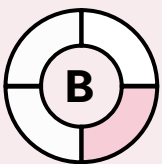
Each theme contains a series of project design prompts that are relevant across different stages of a project. The typical stages are illustrated below and show how the FIT Standards and resources can be used to inform decision making around delivery of high quality, multifunctional open spaces:

Stage A: Getting started



- undertake stakeholder mapping to inform the engagement process
- define whether a local needs assessment of existing spaces and facilities exists or needs to be commissioned
- using the needs assessment, agree with the client and key stakeholders the expected outcomes of the project using the six themes as a guide to add most value to the existing and new provision
- establish a clear project brief with a vision and agreed outcomes

Stage B: Concept design

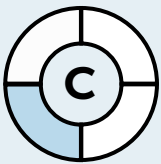


- use the Benchmarks to make an initial assessment of the type and amount of open space that will be needed for the development based on the number of homes and future population
- consider where larger open spaces should be located to enable safe and inclusive access for all
- assess how people will get to all types of spaces depending on their age and mobility; consider how their journeys can be safe, accessible and playful
- identify where types of open space could overlap and consider the integration of multi-functional uses and their compatibility, identifying opportunities and risks
- using the initial analysis, develop an open space strategy for the site ensuring that the open spaces are positioned to maximise use and connectivity to the community, for example not on the outskirts of the development. This should set out the open space requirements for the site based on local needs assessment and application of the FIT benchmarks along with any local policy requirements. The strategy should also explain how those requirements are integrated into the site, responding to the six themes
- in instances where delivering the quantity or the typologies based on the Benchmarks is challenging, then consider alternative approaches or contributions based on the local needs assessment, spatial analysis and community engagement - this could include a financial contribution towards improving nearby existing open spaces

Stage B: Concept design continued

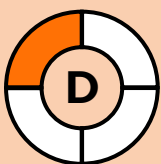
- carry out further engagement of stakeholders and the local community to test and develop the initial open space strategy
- work with stakeholders to develop plans for effective long-term management and community involvement
- consider engaging experts in biodiversity, play, access and inclusion to support the development of the design
- identify local champions (Elected Members, Local Authority officers or members of the local community, for example) who can support delivery and stewardship of better quality open spaces

Stage C: Detailed design and construction



- clearly set out the process and analysis that has informed the projects open space strategy
- demonstrate and document the approach taken to meet the project outcomes across the six themes and how the FIT Standards have been interpreted
- engage with suppliers and contractors to consider sustainable approaches, robustness and ease of repair – make sure that they understand the intended outcomes of the project
- continue to collaborate and engage with stakeholders and the local community to explain any design decisions that may change what they see built
- consider how to involve the community in the construction phase e.g. planting, work parties, communications, phased projects
- continue to work with the community on any plans for long-term stewardship and management

Stage D: Use



- undertake post occupancy evaluations with communities and design teams that can feed back into FIT case studies and ongoing research
- ensure model for long-term stewardship management and maintenance is agreed and sustainable

Benchmarks

The Benchmarks enable calculations to be made on the quantity and accessibility of open space, outdoor sports and play spaces. They give a consistent, instructive guide which can be used to supplement local standards to create betterment. As a basis for guiding the thinking for local open space and play policies, they can inform planning decisions on individual proposals. The Benchmarks are a starting point for the design process and should be applied according to local circumstances taking into account existing provision.

Local need, assessment and new provision

It is important to assess local need to ensure that sufficient provision of open space is created. This can be defined by an assessment of existing provision in relation to local population data to understand if the Benchmarks are being met or if there is a shortfall. New development schemes should provide a range of open space, outdoor sports and play spaces relevant to the development scale.

Mapping existing provision as part of the local assessment provides analysis to inform proposals. FIT's [Green Space Index](#) applies the Benchmarks to give a spatial analysis of the current and projected levels of open space in a local area based on population numbers and walking routes (that can also help identify where developer contributions

could be directed for new community infrastructure). The analysis can be used at the start and throughout the planning and design process, to discuss bespoke data and spatial analysis to meet your requirements on a consultancy or partnership basis please email info@fieldsintrust.org

In instances such as constrained urban high-density developments where delivering the quantity, or the typologies set out in the Benchmarks is challenging then alternative approaches or contributions should be considered based on the local needs assessment, spatial analysis and community engagement. This could include a financial contribution towards improving and enhancing existing open spaces where those spaces are situated within the respective walking distances of the proposed development.



Calculating population

The quantity of space is calculated using the Benchmarks for different typologies per 1000 people and the population size. Using local population data, usually from the latest census, and using average household sizes for the relevant local planning authority provides the most accurate estimate for the type of development proposed in specific locations. For example, the number of residents vary for smaller units such as flats compared to larger houses. Where local data on household size is not available then the national average from the [Office for National Statistics](#) is used as a starting point, as of 2022 this is 2.36 people per household, rounded up to 2.4.

The Benchmarks relate to residential and mixed-use developments including Build to Rent and non-specialist residential use. Where there are specialist uses, high levels of student housing, or sheltered accommodation the Benchmarks may be adjusted based on the proposed demographic. This should be justified through the open space strategy.

Accessibility

Accessibility should be measured as distances that are actually travelled rather than 'as the crow flies'. Equivalent walking times in minutes can be easier to understand, so an average of 10 minutes for every 800 metres walked is a guide. However, consideration should be given to walking speeds of different ages and abilities.



To help drive a broader agenda of quality and accessibility of open spaces, the framework of themes should be used alongside the Benchmarks.

Overview

Open space

Parks and gardens

- minimum of 0.80 hectares per 1000 people (8 metres squared per person)



Amenity green space

- minimum of 0.60 hectares per 1000 people (6 metres squared per person)



Natural and semi-natural

- minimum of 1.8 hectares per 1000 people (18 metres squared per person)



Outdoor sports

Outdoor sport pitches, courts and greens, tracks and trails

- minimum of 1.6 hectares per 1000 people (16 metres squared per person) (consisting of 1.2 hectares sport pitches, 0.4 hectares courts, greens, tracks, trails or sports equipment) within 1200 metres walking distance from homes



Play space

Equipped designated play areas

- minimum of 0.25 hectares per 1000 people (2.5 metres squared per person), Local Areas of Play (LAPs) within 100 metres, Local Equipped Areas of Play LEAPs within 400 metres and Neighbourhood Equipped Areas of Play (NEAPS) within 1000 metres walking distances from homes



Informal play provision

- minimum of 0.30 hectares per 1000 people (3 metres squared per person) distributed throughout a development, larger facilities such as Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA) or pump tracks within 700 metres walking distance from homes



Total open space: minimum of 3.2 hectares per 1000 people (32 metres squared per person)

Total outdoor sports: minimum of 1.6 hectares per 1000 people (16 metres squared per person)

Total play space: minimum of 0.55 hectares per 1000 people (5.5 metres squared per person)

Overall total: minimum of 5.35 hectares per 1000 population (53.5 metres squared per person)

Open space

There are many different types of public open space that sit within a wider network of green infrastructure. Defining and grouping open space typologies can be challenging as there can often be cross over with types, uses and some being semi-private. We have grouped the open space Benchmarks into three main types as defined below.

Parks and gardens:

For example, urban parks and squares, country parks, regional parks, forest parks, and formal gardens.

Amenity green space:

For example, informal recreation spaces, communal green spaces in and around housing, village greens, urban commons, allotments and growing spaces and other incidental spaces which may include areas of hard spaces as well as green spaces.

Natural and semi-natural urban green spaces:

For example, woodland, scrub, grassland, heath or moor, wetlands, open and running water and open access land.

All homes should be within 200m-300m walking distance of open space with everyone having access to the full range of open space types with 1000m.



Minster Park, Sunderland. © Sunderland City Council



Pease Portage, Sussex. © Thakeham



Sighthill, Glasgow. © Chris Swan

Outdoor sports

Outdoor sports are often thought of as pitches for team sports, however there is a much wider range of sport types that can be facilitated within open spaces including courts, trails and water-based sports. An assessment of existing local facilities as well as community engagement should be undertaken to help understand any shortfalls or demand for new facilities.



Graded mountain biking trail, Y Wal, Wales. © LDA Design

Pitch sports:

For example, football, rugby, hockey and cricket pitches.

Courts and greens sports:

For example, tennis, netball, basketball, padel ball, volleyball and bowling greens.

Tracks, trails and sports equipment:

For example, athletics tracks, graded mountain biking trails, canoeing, open water swimming, outdoor gym trails.



Hockey Pitch, Eton Manor, London. © Robin Forster

The recommended spatial requirements for some of the more popular outdoor sports are included on the following page which allow for the overall space including principal play area, run-off areas and space for teams and officials, where relevant.

Sport pitches should take into account the level of play, topography, necessary safety margins and optimal orientation from season to season. Unless stated otherwise, the areas given are those for senior use and the information is provided only as a guide. Further best practice and guidance of each type of facility can be found in publications from sports councils, national governing sporting bodies or professional or trade organisations, such as The Grounds Management Association and the Sports and Play Construction Association.

Where artificial pitches with floodlighting support a higher intensity of use, this could support a reduction in the quantity of provision, subject to negotiation with the Local Planning Authority. It should form part of a clear open space strategy for the site and have long-term management plans in place.



Playing pitches

- **association football**
 - adult and U17/18 0.74 hectares, 106 x 70 metres
 - mini soccer U7/U8 pitch: 0.14 hectares, 43 x 33 metres
 - mini soccer U9/10 pitch: 0.26 hectares, 61 x 43 metres
- **rugby union:** 1.23 hectares, 154 x 80 metres
- **hockey:** 0.64 hectares, 101.4 x 63.0 metres
- **cricket, senior recreational 12 pitch:** 1.43 hectares, 111.56 x 128.04 metres



Courts and greens

- **tennis courts**
 - 1 recreational court, 0.06 hectares, 34.75 x 17.07 metres
 - 2 recreational courts, 0.1 hectares, 34.75 x 31.77 metres
- **netball court:** 0.05 hectares, 34.5 x 18.25 metres
- **basketball court:** 0.06 hectares, 32.1 x 19.1 metres
- **padel ball court:** 0.03 hectares, 14 x 20 metres
- **volleyball court:** 0.05 hectares, 26 x 18 metres
- **bowling greens flat:** 0.12 hectares, 34.4 x 34.4 metres
- **bowling greens crown:** 0.08 hectares, 27.4 x 27.4 metres



Tracks, trails and sports equipment

- **athletics six-lane track:** 1.5 hectares, 172.03 x 87.64 metres
- other types, for example mountain biking trails, water-based sports or outdoor gym trails, are bespoke to their context

Play space



Blythe Valley Park, Solihull. © LDA Design

Successful play is rooted in its place, integrated into the landscape and the communities it serves creating play friendly spaces that are accessible and inclusive for all.

Only providing standalone equipped play spaces in developments is limiting, the Benchmarks therefore incorporate equipped and informal play quantities. To deliver quality, a site-wide open space and play strategy should demonstrate how different types of play spaces are integrated into a development, connected to each other, close to home and designed to enhance their setting providing a range of inter-connected play experiences in the heart of a development. Where they are and how they connect through a network of playable, safe and accessible streets and open spaces is as important as any equipment provided at the destination. Adventure playgrounds, podium



Sighthill, Glasgow. © Chris Swan

and terrace play, internal communal play space in high-density schemes and facilitated play sessions may complement other play spaces.

Equipped designated play spaces:

Traditional play types include Local Area of Play (LAPs), Local Equipped Area of Play (LEAPs), Neighbourhood Equipped Areas of Play (NEAPs). The concept was evolved by Fields in Trust and partners in the 1990s as a way to inspire the creation of better play opportunities for everyone and address the lack of access in many areas. The definitions are based on the age of children they are designed for, location, size and type of experience.

Informal play

For example, pump tracks or multi-use games areas and playful features integrated and distributed within a development.

Local Areas for Play (LAPs) for very young children

A small area of open space specifically designed and primarily laid out for very young children to play close to where they live interwoven within the development. Every home should have access to play space within 100 metres. LAPs are designed to allow for ease of informal observation and supervision and primarily function to encourage informal play and social interaction for toddlers. A LAP requires no play equipment as such, relying more on demonstrative features indicating that play is positively encouraged.

It should provide a minimum area of 100 square metres but this can be distributed within a development as part of playable routes.



Everton Pond Garden, Liverpool.
© Richard Scott



Claridge Way, Thamesmead,
London. © Jan Kattein Architects



Pounds Park, Sheffield. © Oliver Ibbotson

Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs) for young and independent children

An area of open space specifically designed and laid out with features including equipment for children who are beginning to play independently with friends, without accompanying adults, and for adults with young children. Spaces should be reached safely by children and be within 400 metres walking distance from every home. They should be located at the heart of the site and not on the outskirts of the development, with no significant barriers such as main roads.

Spaces should provide for informal recreation and varied, stimulating and challenging play experiences. For example, equipment or natural landscape features which cater for different play types that test children's physical capabilities as well as provide imaginative, social and sensory play with natural materials such as sand and water, or other activities.

It should provide a minimum area of 400 square metres.



Houlton, Rugby. © Bradley Murphy Design



Buckler's Park, Crowthorne.
© Mcgregor Smith

Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAPs) for older more independent children

This is an area of open space specifically designed, laid out and equipped mainly for older more independent children who go further from home but potentially with play opportunities for younger children or siblings as well.

Spaces should be reached safely by children and young people and be within 1000 metres walking distance from home. It should have a minimum area of 1000 square metres. Spaces should provide a wider range of play experiences than a LEAP with age-appropriate play and informal recreational experiences for children and young people. There are likely to be more challenging items of equipment and features that meet the needs of older children and young people and sufficient space to play larger group games and seating and shelter to enable young people to socialise with their friends.



Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire. © LDA Design



Clissold Park, London. © Robin Forster

Informal play for all

This includes facilities specifically designed for informal recreation such as pump tracks, parkour elements, bouldering walls, social areas for teenagers, ball courts, multi-use games area or skateboard areas which can provide the opportunity for a variety of experiences to young people with differing skill levels.

Playful features integrated and distributed within a development along active travel routes, within playable streets or open spaces may include play trails, sensory routes, playable public art or changes in levels and textures that encourage interaction with nature. These can create joyful and playful routes connecting destination play spaces, schools and local facilities that encourage active lifestyles.

Informal play spaces should be reached safely by children and young people. Larger games areas for older children should be within 700m walking distance from home and have a minimum area of 1000 square metres (for example a typical MUGA court dimension is 40 x 20 metres).



Clissold Park, London. © Robin Forster



Sighthill, Glasgow. © Chris Swan



Northstowe, Cambridge. © LDA Design

Play spaces should be located at the heart of a development. We have removed reference to requirements for separation buffer zones to avoid any unintended consequences of pushing play spaces to the edge of new developments.

Play provision in relation to development scale

All projects should include a clear open space strategy explaining how the provision for play responds to local need, provides for all ages and is based on accessibility and current provision.

The following gives a guide on the mix of different play spaces that should be provided for different sizes of developments and therefore differing quantities of play space. These are all subject to adhering to the walking distance guidelines.

Developments:

- up to 20 homes should provide informal play spaces
- between 21 and 100 homes should provide Local Areas of Play (LAPs) and informal play spaces
- between 100 and 500 homes should provide Local Areas of Play (LAPs), Local Equipped Areas of Play (LEAPs) and informal play spaces
- of more than 500 homes should provide all types of play spaces for all ages.

The Village Green, Priors Hall Park, Corby.
© Paul Upward Photography



Pump track at Blythe Valley Park, Solihull.



Case studies

Fields in Trust Standards have been used to shape myriad open and green spaces. The following case studies are examples of the Standards in action. They demonstrate best practice and also share the challenges and lessons learned to help with future decision making and to ensure quality continues to improve. Each has clear strengths, illustrating how to create accessible, inclusive and active spaces, from ball games to kitchen gardens to incidental play. These are spaces that are instantly welcoming, well used and that communities feel proud of and have a sense of ownership over. They show that the Standards are the best place to start any project.

Loftus Garden Village, Newport



Ruby Loftus Garden © Pobl Group

Buckler's Park, Crowthorne



Pioneer Play © Macgregor Smith

Priors Hall Park, Corby



Quarry View © Paul Upward Photography

Northstowe, Cambridge



Sustainable drainage © LDA Design

Loftus Garden Village

Location

Newport, Wales

Local Planning Authority

Newport City Council

Project team and roles

Client: Pobl Group, Master planner: Alan Baxter, Housebuilder and contractor: Lovell Partnership Ltd, Architect: Hammond Architectural, Landscape: Studio Engleback

Maintenance and management

Gardeners are employed by Pobl Group to maintain the communal spaces, funded via a residents' service charge

Awards and accolades

Winner 'Development of the year' CIH Welsh Housing Awards 2017 & Winner 'Best Residential Development of the Year' Insider Wales Property Awards 2016

Project overview

Loftus Garden Village is a distinctive new place built on a former industrial site, with sustainability and green infrastructure at its heart. A third of the development is high-quality public open space. It responds to the urgent need for social housing and 60% of the homes are affordable with no visible identification of different tenures.

Influence of FIT Standards

Newport City Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance required a single LEAP for the site but the developer was ambitious to use this as a starting point to embed more play at the heart of the site. An approach was negotiated with the Council, as part of the pre-application process expanding on that provision, to deliver two more informal inventive play parks. The smaller East Park is aimed at younger children and the larger Ruby Loftus Garden also provides space for older children to engage with nature, play games, run and explore.



Village pond at Ruby Loftus Garden.
© Pobl Group

Site area

6.5 hectares (Phase 1)

Category/type

Brownfield infill city centre residential development of 250 homes

The influence of the Standards is shown through the themes

Inclusive:

A local needs assessment prompted the design of informal play spaces which complemented existing provision. The site was close to existing parks that provided for ball games and traditional play equipment. New play provision was therefore designed to be freer and more adventurous, to provide different experiences. Layout and positioning were informed by effective public consultation.

Active:

The green and open spaces are designed to support social activities, such as children's play and community events. Communal gardening is encouraged in the kitchen gardens and parks, and this is supporting active, sociable and healthy lifestyles as well as teaching children about growing and caring for plants.

Wellbeing:

Public bodies in Wales are legally obliged to take decisions which further the wellbeing of future generations. This informed the vision to achieve a high level of community integration, a strong sense of local ownership and long-term self-management. It has contributed to

the local area improving its ranking in the Welsh Government's deprivation index for the physical environment.

Climate:

60% of the site is green. Play areas feature bioswale 'moats' to capture rainwater and strengthen the area's climate resilience. Over 250 new trees, many varieties chosen for their fruiting and foraging potential, help to reduce the urban heat island effect and can absorb 5,500kg of CO₂ per year.

Nature:

The development supports nature recovery by 'borrowing' front gardens and connecting to the railway ecological corridor to strengthen the contiguous biodiverse public realm.

Community:

Pobl is a social landlord and manages the site with the support of two community gardeners who they employ. The community closes the street for play days and events such as the Queen's Jubilee lunch and is highly valued by the local community.

Lessons learnt

- involving and engaging the local community was integral to the approach and helped shape the design and future use of the spaces
- early support from local authority officers enabled a more balanced approach to play across the site with more adventurous and inventive opportunities
- focus on growing food and the gardening network across the whole development has supported educational and communal activities
- research commissioned for the development highlights the

placemaking effects that high quality open and green spaces have to enable financial and social value, with tenancies being maintained and residents staying for the long term

Project focus

The generous public realm provides opportunities for the whole community to come together, learn and grow, and host regular community events. Attractive open space includes green streets, two informal play parks, kitchen gardens, home zones and garden squares. The spaces enable inventive play by providing a rich landscape that includes changes of levels, and plenty of incidental play along the way.

Buckler's Park

Location

Bracknell Forest, Crowthorne, Berkshire

Local Planning Authority

Bracknell Forest Council

Project team and roles

Client: Cala Homes / Legal & General Homes; Strategic Masterplan and Design
Code: Tibbalds; Detailed Landscape Design: Macgregor Smith

Maintenance and management

Private management company and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) by The Land Trust

Awards and accolades

Shortlisted for the Landscape Institute 2022 'Excellence in Public Health and Wellbeing' Award

Project overview

Buckler's Park lies within a historic site. Formerly the Government Transport Research Laboratory, the site has distinctive heritage with vehicle test tracks and historic trails. The open spaces are designed to respond to the dual challenges of climate change and nature recovery through multifunctionality. For example, stormwater swales are designed into play spaces to add to their interest, play and habitat value.

Influence of FIT Standards

Bracknell Forest Borough Council's Standards for Open Space of Public Value is based on the FIT Benchmarks and LAPs, LEAPs and NEAPs. The design team provided a range of play spaces but paid particular attention to accessibility and connectivity from the doorstep through to neighbourhood glades and larger equipped play areas, as well as ensuring formal and informal sports provision. Opportunities for incidental play are incorporated throughout the development, with fitness trails and networks of paths for walking and cycling, which extend into the SANG.



Woodland play glade.
© Macgregor Smith

Site area

105 hectares including 42-hectare SANG

Category/type

Residential development of 1,000 homes

The influence of the Standards is shown through the themes

Inclusive:

Accessibility and inclusivity were key design principles adopted early in the process and maintained throughout. These included strong signage and wayfinding, gentle gradients for paths and inclusive play equipment. The approach to inclusive design started at a strategic level through connections and co-location of spaces to integrate with neighbouring communities.

Active:

The development allows people to experience a wide range of habitats in a stimulating outdoor environment, for example by integrating fragments of vehicle test tracks and historic forest rides. Play for all ages was a central theme. Providing strategic cycle and pedestrian connections encourages safe and active travel to all open spaces.

Wellbeing:

The masterplan focussed on restorative health benefits and mental health and wellbeing support, through contact with nature. Retaining the site's heritage helps to create a sense of place and belonging through the repurposed infrastructure.

Climate:

The design identifies and responds to significant local future risks around woodland fire, drought and flooding. Careful selection of plants and the introduction of a new woodland management plan will support local climate resilience.

Nature:

The retention and integration of large areas of existing woodland and daylighting the forest stream has drawn nature into the development, increasing the biodiversity of the existing commercially grown forest. The SANG is now designated as a Local Wildlife Site.

Community:

Following the outline application, a working party was created to develop design ideas for the SANG and initial neighbourhood glades. Using the SANG as a backdrop, centralised community facilities evolved to co-locate provision such as tennis courts, sports pitches and allotments. Doorstep and neighbourhood glades were designed to accommodate play alongside space that facilitates social and communal activities for all ages.

Lessons learnt

- the 'Environmental Gain' approach to structuring the landscape gained the support of the local authority landscape officer, local community and stakeholders
- existing site features, along with a strong vision and narrative, enabled a bespoke response to the landscape
- by working with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) a contextual approach to risk was taken with greater risk associated with wilder spaces
- building in resilience through designing a landscape that can help mitigate

the extremes of weather conditions - negotiating the integration of SuDS as part of the open space, which offers opportunities for naturalistic play

- creating allotments and edible landscapes that can play a role as an alternative active recreational space

Project focus

The development aims to respond to its distinctive landscape setting with a rich network of play spaces from the doorstep to the wilder experiences of the SANG. These directly benefit neighbouring communities as well.

Priors Hall Park

Location

Corby, East Midlands

Local Planning Authority

North Northamptonshire

Project team and roles

Client: Master Developer: Urban & Civic;
Master planners: David Locke; Landscape Design: Phase one, LDA Design & Phase two and three The Environmental Dimension Partnership; Play Consultant: Timberplay

Maintenance and management

Estate management contract/service

Awards and accolades

Shortlisted for the Landscape Institute 2022 'Excellence in Public Health and Wellbeing' Award.



The Village Green. © Urban&Civic

Site area

390 hectares (all three phases)

Category/type

Residential development of 4,100+ homes delivered in three phases

Project overview

Set within a former ironstone quarry, Priors Hall Park has homes grouped across three distinct landscape character areas, set within lakes, open parkland and forests. Play provision includes LAPs, LEAPs and NEAPs, football, tennis and cricket pitches, amphitheatres along with fitness areas. The first two phases of the development will deliver approximately 75% of the projected housing. Play areas are themed to respond to the heritage of the site, for example, The Quarry incorporates mounds and boulders.

Influence of FIT Standards

The Children's Play Strategy established spacing, quantum and equipment requirements for each play space based on FIT Standards. Although a single NEAP for phase one would cover the entire site, provision was split over three locations and still delivering the necessary space requirement whilst also providing enhanced opportunities through different characters and provision of play.

The influence of the Standards is shown through the themes

Inclusive:

NEAPs and LEAPs are connected through a linear link with LAPs providing play-along-the-way to form circular play trails across the wider site. Inclusive and accessible play equipment for a wide range of users and abilities are incorporated into the spaces along with the creation of a barrier-free environment including wheelchair access.

Active:

Dedicated fitness areas, with equipment arranged along a continuous trail are connected to a smartphone app enabling people to create individualised programmes. Seating areas with planting integrate this equipment into the wider area.

Wellbeing:

Distinct play areas located within open spaces and along connecting green corridors makes it easier for people to build links with their immediate neighbours, creating better community cohesion, helping reduce loneliness and social isolation.

Climate:

The spaces all heavily rely upon natural resources, and feature seasonal planting, promoting better biodiversity. Tree planting was integrated into play spaces in strategic locations to provide shade and reduce the risk of overheating.

Nature:

The layout of the play areas are all responsive to the landscape setting. For example the play areas neighbouring the County Wildlife Site 'The Gullet' which contains calcareous grassland are informed by this and consider the ecological impact of any leaf fall as not to negatively impact the habitat.

Community:

Larger NEAP spaces were planned as community hubs to allow space for families and children across the site to gather. The Village Green for example has areas for picnicking, playing games, socialising and relaxing.

Lessons learnt

- interconnected play should be considered from outline planning - the journey between spaces is an important part of the overall experience
- considering lighting and safety along the connecting play routes helps to facilitate active travel and reduce the tendency to drive
- opportunities for play for all ages can be designed into spaces that encourages greater use
- investing in open space and play has generated value in the project for

Urban and Civic as the developers providing multiple benefits to the residents

Project focus

Linking safe and attractive playable routes to local schools and around the development allows for learning along the way, encourages active travel and creates time and space for social interactions. The provision of facilities associated with play spaces such as chess tables and table tennis provide activities for those supervising so parents and carers can join in and get to know each other.

Northstowe

Healthy living and youth & play strategy

Location

Northstowe, Cambridgeshire

Local Planning Authority

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Project team and roles

Master developer/client: Homes England,
Landscape: Chris Blandford Associates
in collaboration with Health Advice:
Catherine Max Consulting, Play Advice:
Rethinking Childhood

Maintenance and management

A separate management and maintenance strategy will be prepared for approval by the Council

Awards and accolades

Highly commended for the Local Landscape Planning Award in the Landscape Institute Awards 2021

Project overview

Northstowe is 1 of 10 Healthy New Towns, an NHS England initiative. The Healthy Living and Youth & Play Strategy builds on the latest evidence and emerging best practice to show how healthy living and play can be embedded into the design of green infrastructure aiming to address the health challenges of obesity and long-term conditions to promote active ageing and resilience for all. The principles and ideas were tested at workshops with key stakeholders to ensure the guidance was appropriate and relevant.

Influence of FIT Standards

The S106 agreement required a Youth and Play Strategy that was in accordance with Local Planning Authority policy and FIT Standards. Destination play areas are drawn from FIT Standards, together with the approach to NEAPs, LEAPs, LAPs and their catchment areas, complemented with Space for Imaginative Play (SIP).



Water play feature. © LDA Design

Site area

Phase 2 approximately 53 hectares
(490 hectares all phases)

Category/type

Healthy New Town, 3,500 homes during Phase 2 (10,000 in total)

The influence of the Standards is shown through the themes

Inclusive:

The consultation process involved local children of all ages. The resulting proposals accommodate those with autism and dementia and a range of physical needs, to create places which feel safe and relaxing for everyone.

Active:

Active routes were strategically designed in to encourage physical activity, incorporating trails and circuits with outdoor gym equipment. There is formal and informal sports provision including volleyball and parkour elements as well as nature, water and heritage themed play.

Wellbeing:

Designing for 'Positive Social Interaction' meant creating places to chat and quieter zones, incidental play, gathering spaces and senior play provision, with gentle outdoor games, spaces for tai chi, and calming water features.

Climate:

Cutting pollution and climate adaptation were both key to the Strategy. Interventions include pedestrian priority, reducing car speed limits; planting for filtering pollution and wind protection; and water features to improve local microclimate.

Nature:

Connecting with nature is a key part of the vision for Northstowe, with multi-sensory gardens, seasonal interest, a barefoot trail and simple interventions such as bird hides, nesting boxes, bug towers, log piles, pond dipping and den building.

Community:

Outdoor spaces are co-located to encourage sociability, for example, with informal play close to educational buildings. Flexibility of spaces that accommodate a variety of uses, from pop-up food markets to barbeques.

Lessons learnt

- the principle of integrating LAPs into low traffic play streets has brought play to people's doorsteps
- through engagement, local children said they wanted adventurous play with bespoke and unusual elements to make it distinctive, as well as things along the way to draw attention and maintain interest
- providing open space, sports provision and play up front provides space for community cohesion in light of other facilities such as shops and cafes not being delivered until later stages of the development

Project focus

Designing a new community in a way which models the latest thinking on how to optimise mental and physical health and wellbeing has led to a holistic strategy, where play is integrated into the daily experience of people of all ages.

Signposting



Signposting Theme 1: Accessible, safe, and inclusive

- [Activity Alliance](#) is the national charity for disabled people in sport and activity
- [Age UK](#) is the leading charity for older people in the UK and provides advice on keeping active in old age
- [Black2Nature](#) is a campaign for equal access to nature, concentrating on improving access for minority ethnic groups
- the British Standards Institution Document [Design for the Mind](#) provides technical standards and guidance on the design of the built environment for a neurodiverse society
- [The Donaldson Trust](#) is Scotland's leading charity for neurodiversity
- The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) [Engagement Overlay](#) provides guidance on engage through each RIBA Plan of Work stage to promote best practice
- [Plan inclusive Play Areas \(PiPA\)](#) offers a useful checklist of items for designers to consider when designing play spaces
- [#refugeeswelcome in parks](#) is a resource book on how to facilitate wellbeing and inclusion in public spaces and overcomes barriers to use for refugees and asylum seekers
- [Scope](#) is the disability equality charity for England and Wales
- [Sensory Trust](#) is the leading charity on inclusive and sensory design in the UK
- [Register of Play Inspectors International \(RPII\)](#) is the official UK body for examining, accrediting and certifying outdoor play inspectors
- [The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents](#) provide information on health and safety standards
- [Voice Opportunity Power](#) is a youth engagement toolkit to help involve young people in the making and managing of their neighbourhoods



Signposting Theme 2: Promote active healthy lifestyles

- [Make Space for Girls](#) is a charity which campaigns for parks and public spaces to be designed with teenage girls in mind
- [Parkrun](#) is a collection of 5-kilometre events for runners, walkers and volunteers that takes place weekly in locations across the UK and abroad
- each nation has organisations for children's play; [Play England](#), [Play Wales](#), [Play Scotland](#) and [Play Board Northern Ireland](#)
- [Rethinking Childhood](#) is a website managed by Tim Gill, an independent play professional, providing research and guidance on play

Signposting Theme 2 Promote active healthy lifestyles continued

- each nation has organisations responsible for the growth of grassroots sport and getting people active; [Sport England](#), [Sport Wales](#), [SportScotland](#) and [Sport Northern Ireland](#)
- [Sustrans](#) is one of the key walking, wheeling and cycling charities in the UK and has produced relevant design guidance
- each nation has a national governing body for swimming, including open water swimming; [Swim England](#), [Swim Wales](#), [Scottish Swimming](#) and [Swim Ulster](#) (Northern Ireland)



Signposting Theme 3: Support mental wellbeing

- [The 'Dementia-friendly sport and physical activity guide'](#) by the [Alzheimer's Society](#) provides guidance on making outdoor spaces accessible and inclusive for older people
- the [UK Men's Shed Association](#) supports the development of community spaces for men to connect, converse and create
- the [Mental Health Foundation](#) is the UK's leading charity working in mental health research
- [MIND](#) is the UK's leading charity offering advice and support for people struggling with mental health

- the [National Academy for Social Prescribing](#) is the national charity that champions social prescribing. Social prescribing is a way of connecting people to non-medical support to address health and wellbeing issues which cannot be addressed by doctors and medicine alone (e.g. loneliness and stress)



Signposting Theme 4: Resilient to climate change

- the [Design Council](#) produces guidance on adapting public space to climate change
- professional institutes such as the [Landscape Institute](#) provide strategic advice and information on technical issues related to landscaping
- the [SuDS Manual](#), produced by CIRIA and the Department for Environmental Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) provides a best practice framework for designing sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and the integration of SuDS in the design of outdoor spaces
- [Sustainable drainage systems \(SuDS\): Maximising the potential for people and wildlife'](#) by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) provides guidance on how to maximise the biodiversity potential of SuDS and provides key design criteria



Signposting Theme 5: Provide space for nature to thrive

- government organisations such as [Natural England](#), [Natural Resources Wales](#), [NatureScot](#) and the [Northern Ireland Environment Agency](#) provide evidence and advice on the protection and enhancement of nature for each of the devolved nations
- [Nature Nurture](#) is a creative social enterprise which supports communities in connecting to local greenspaces and waterways, through co-creation of nature initiatives and activities
- the [Soil Association](#) and [Plantlife](#) both provide guidance and research on soils, plants, and fungi
- the [Trees and Design Action Group](#), the [Woodland Trust](#) and [Forest Research](#) all provide guidance and research on tree planting
- the [Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust](#) is the UK's leading wetland conservation charity for guidance and research on wetlands
- [Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) is an environment and wildlife coalition campaigning to protect, conserve and enhance nature
- [The Wildlife Trusts](#) is the federation for Wildlife Trusts across the UK which are place-based independent charities working to make a positive difference to wildlife through awareness raising



Signposting Theme 6: Adaptable to community needs

- [Common Ground](#) is a charity working in community conservation and environmental education in England
- [The Conservation Volunteers \(TCV\)](#) is a volunteering charity focused on supporting local community groups undertaking environmental conservation work
- [Groundwork](#) is a federation of charities supporting community action on poverty and the environment across the UK. They have specialist teams for implementation and community engagement
- the [National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces \(NFPGS\)](#) is the umbrella organisation that aims to amplify the voices of Friends Groups across the UK. They share learning, develop good practice, and strengthen grassroots organisation, coordination, and co-operation throughout the UK
- [The Orchard Project](#) is a national charity dedicated to the creation, restoration and celebration of community orchards
- [Social Farms & Gardens](#) are a UK wide charity supporting communities to farm, garden and grow food together. They provide advice and information on community involvement and food growing within green spaces
- the [Urban Agriculture Consortium](#) produces training modules to support local food growing initiatives



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