



**Nature Towns
and Cities**

**How to put health
at the heart of parks
and green spaces**



The 10 steps in this guide can help you deliver greater health benefits for communities in your parks and green spaces.

They're designed to be followed and revisited in the order that's most appropriate for your place.

Assess the physical and social infrastructure of your green spaces

This helps you understand what features are currently helping people's health and wellbeing, and highlights what is missing or could be improved upon (e.g. benches, picnic areas, outdoor gyms, wild areas, footpaths and cycle routes).

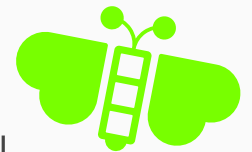
You can also identify and remove any barriers which might be preventing different communities from using the green spaces. Barriers can be highly localised and include proximity, physical obstacles, transport, lack of facilities and social barriers - such as perceptions of safety, a lack of awareness or low confidence.

In practice...

Camden and Islington Borough Council commissioned an audit of their parks to identify how well the infrastructure supported people to be active outdoors and connect with nature.



Look at the health data



This helps you understand your local community, their needs and who would benefit most from accessing parks and green spaces.

The information you learn from health and health inequalities data can support strategic planning, informing decisions on where to target interventions to maximise the health benefits of green spaces for people.

Get to know your local communities

This helps you form relationships with local people and intermediary organisations, to co-deliver the maximum benefits for the community.

It will be different for every community that you work with, but together you can:

- Map what work and activities they're already doing to help reduce health inequalities and improve health and wellbeing.
- Understand what they need and want and work together on how to maximise this.

Camden and Islington engaged an external agency through surveys, workshops, interviews and mapping to support the delivery of this work.

Read our [Visioning together guide](#)...

For ideas on how to bring teams and communities together, to shape a better future for their local parks and green space.

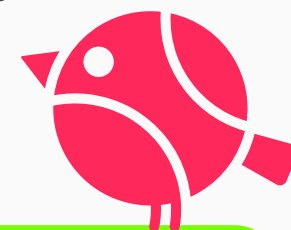




Work in partnership with the health system

This helps you make the most of relationships within the health sector and form mutually beneficial partnerships. Delivering green social prescribing particularly relies on strong connections with link workers in your local area.

The health system can differ across the UK, but your internal public health team and partners across other health organisations can help you understand the structure and how it works. Voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations are often commissioned to deliver health and social care provision, so they can also provide a vital partnership and connection with the health and care system. It's a good idea to build in a substantial amount of time and resources to get the most from this step.



In practice...

Camden and Islington worked with the Public Health team, Clinical Commissioning Group, Primary Care Networks, GP link workers and VCSE link workers. You can hear more about the steps they took in this [webinar](#).

Activate your green spaces

This helps you shape green spaces where people can actively improve their health. From delivering a green social prescribing services, to working with partners who use your parks or green spaces as a venue.

Activities should be co-designed by organisations from the health and VCSE sectors, residents and people who manage the parks and green spaces. Talk to colleagues from public health, existing partners, local VCSE organisations and GP practices to work out who needs to be involved.

Camden and Islington spoke to the Clinical Commissioning Group, local GPs, NHS Mental Health Trust, the Public Health team, Adult and Children's Social Care, Age UK, Voluntary Action Camden and Voluntary Action Islington, and friends of groups. They ran three discussion sessions that led to the development of 15 activity proposals (some that the council was already delivering, or could deliver, and some that external groups would run).

Top tip...

Pilot and evaluate your activities to understand their effectiveness and how you might improve and develop them.





Empower your communities

This helps you empower and support individuals and groups to deliver activities within your green spaces.

Let them know that parks and green spaces can be venues and spaces for things they are already doing or things they would love to do.

Camden and Islington empowered their communities by doing three simple things:

1. Providing seed funding to community groups to help them get activities up and running.
2. Creating a simple process that enabled communities to register their activities with the council.
3. Providing guidance to support and encourage their activities, such as a walking tour guide.

Market your parks and green spaces

This helps you connect with those communities, groups and individuals who need less support to access the benefits of being outdoors.

Simply knowing more about where the parks and green spaces are, what they have to offer, which facilities exist and how welcome they would feel will be enough to encourage visits.

In practice...

Camden and Islington commissioned a targeted marketing campaign and collateral to talk specifically to these audiences.





Invest in your workforce

This helps you get parks and green space teams on the ground to actively unlock health benefits for your communities.

Investing time and money in the team will help ensure they have the skills, confidence, culture and capacity they need. Work out who within existing teams might be able to take on new responsibilities needed, or consider creating new roles.

In practice...

Camden and Islington invested heavily in culture and confidence, with community engagement training, support for volunteers and developing walking tours. They created new roles too, including a Communications Officer, a Fundraising Officer and a Partnership Manager.

Make the case for investment

This helps unlock short and longer-term funding, by quantifying the economic and social value of your green spaces.

It is important to be able to demonstrate the real economic value of your green estate beyond maintenance cost and income generated. A cost-benefit ratio will help to clearly communicate how vital health benefits are, making a stronger case for financial support and further investment.

In practice...

Camden and Islington commissioned a natural capital assessment of their parks and green spaces. They reviewed literature on the social benefits of green space and evaluated their pilot activities. This made a compelling case to protect staff and resource needed to deliver health benefits in their parks, and unlock further funding. They expanded capacity with new partnerships too.





Embed within wider strategy

This helps to secure corporate and strategic support as well as making a wider cultural shift towards parks as health assets.

It is important to embed your work in strategic documents within different departments in your organisation or in similar documents published by health organisations and VCSEs.



In practice...

Camden and Islington's green space teams worked with Public Health to create a joint Parks for Health Strategy.

If you require an alternative format, or if you have questions for the team behind this guide, please email us on info@naturetownsandcities.org.uk



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